

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Sister [REDACTED] LFT

Support person present: No

Others present: Ailis McKeowan, Solicitor, Donnelly & Wall Solicitors

1. My name is name is Sister [REDACTED] LFT. My name at birth was [REDACTED] LFT. My date of birth [REDACTED] 1941. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

The Sisters of Nazareth

2. I joined the Order, the Sisters of Nazareth, in [REDACTED] 1963. I was sent to Cardonald in Glasgow for five years from [REDACTED] 1965 to [REDACTED] 1970. Then I went to Isleworth for a short period and worked with some children. Then I went into hospital for a period of time, and was out of function for about six months. Then Plymouth for fourteen years to work with children, before being sent to South Africa where I remained for 33 years before returning to the UK in [REDACTED] 2017.
3. I trained as a nursery nurse in St Patrick's Hospital in Dublin after leaving school at seventeen and worked in the hospital for six months afterwards. I did a child care course for one year at Robert Gordon College in Aberdeen in the late 1970s before I went to Plymouth. I stayed at Nazareth House for the duration of my studies, but had no connection with the children. I was out during the day and concentrated on my homework in the evenings. I also qualified in general nursing, midwifery and in community health whilst living in South Africa. I qualified as a midwife when I was aged fifty and then went into leadership roles in the Order for ten to fifteen years, but

did not put my nursing or midwifery skills into practice. At least I was there to help the staff. Now I am residing in the UK and I am having respite time.

Nazareth House Children's Home, Cardonald

4. I was told to go to Cardonald in 1965 and had no input into the decision making. There was no interview or vetting or checking process before I went there. When I arrived there was no induction or training offered. I arrived and got into the work immediately. I chose to work in child care as it was the qualification I had following my training in Dublin.
5. I was based on the ground floor and my nursery group was separate from the other children in the house. We had no contact with the other children, they were based upstairs, but their living room was on the ground floor. We weren't allowed to visit other people employed in Nazareth House. I didn't know anything about the other children in the building. I had the care of around 20 to 25 babies from infants to 4.5 years old. They were mixed between boys and girls. The accommodation was very good, they were well cared for and they got very good food.
6. My responsibilities generally were caring for the children and making their lives as good as possible in the environment they were in.
7. We had three members of staff, including myself, which wasn't a great deal for the number of children we had in our care, but it was sufficient. We worked together; I wasn't in charge as such. Two staff members shared a room off the children's bedrooms. There were always three people on duty, and it wasn't left to just one person to be in charge. If a child woke up in the night they were always attended to. We worked 24 hours each day, 7 days per week. I didn't think it was hard then. There was a lovely garden outside with swings and toys. We had a hut that we turned into a playschool, and a former teacher came in every day for our children to teach them for one or two hours, so they were always occupied.

8. When a child first arrived at the home, they were dropped off to us by social workers. We never saw the social workers again. When a child was admitted we had some pre-warning from social work that they were on their way to bring a child in. The social worker would also bring two sets of brand new clothing for the child in addition to what they were already wearing, including shoes. We would all gather round to greet a new child and involve the children who were already in the nursery. They soon settled in.
9. Sister [REDACTED] LFL was in overall charge of the children, and she took the details of the children that were admitted and she kept the registers. All the children were placed with us by social workers. Children from the nursery sometimes got adopted, through mutual friends of Nazareth House. I almost never saw the social workers in the nursery. I think I saw a social worker twice myself. She had brought a little boy who had lived with his granny and she had died. The social worker came in just once to check on him.
10. The nursery did not have a name, it was simply known as the nursery. I don't know if the other groups in Nazareth House had names. I didn't enquire and had too much to do to think about it. I was never invited into other parts of the house to find out and as a result, I have no idea how many children there were in total in Cardonald.
11. I didn't have a mentor or supervisor. Sister [REDACTED] LFL was the nearest I had, and she had no time to supervise me. There was a mother superior above her called Mother [REDACTED] LGE I recall working with a Sister Cathy Campbell and a Sister Rosina Shiels.

Routine at Nazareth House, [REDACTED]

Mornings and bedtime

12. The children would wake up quite early. On a bright, sunny morning they would wake each other up. They would get up for a while and play before getting dressed.

13. Most of the children slept in a small dormitory, with three or four smaller bedrooms off it, with maybe three children in each. We would try to keep siblings in the same bedroom together whenever possible. I slept in a room just off where the children were.

Bedwetting

14. I don't know why, but there were no big issues. If it did happen, we had our own laundry to wash the sheets in. If a child needed to go to the toilet in the night, he or she would cry, and the staff would take them to the toilet.

Clothing

15. When a child was brought into Nazareth House, brand new clothing was bought for him or her. They would have three sets of everything, so we didn't want for clothes. We put names tags in the clothes so they could keep the same ones, but inevitably they would give items to other children. When the clothes were outgrown we might give them to another child. There was a woman based in the laundry within the nursery who could put the name tags in, and wash and mend the clothes.

Mealtimes / Food

16. The children in the nursery got good food. For breakfast, there would be porridge, cereal, bacon and eggs. The dinners would be very wholesome too. It was difficult to get them to eat breakfast sometimes. If a child was reluctant to eat the food we tried to encourage them to eat, if they didn't it was wasted. No child was forced to eat their food, it just wouldn't happen.

17. The meals were prepared in the main kitchen and we had our own small kitchenette to prepare drinks and snacks.

Washing / bathing

18. In my unit, the younger children were bathed in the morning and the older ones in the afternoon. The children did not share bath water. There was plenty of bath water for everyone. We had the use of two different baths for everyone.

School

19. As the children were pre-school ages, they did not leave for school during the day.

Leisure

20. The children were too young for school during the day, but would spend one or two hours with the ex-teacher in the hut, doing jigsaws. They would also spend some of their day with educational toys, as well as playing outside in the afternoon or in the playroom. They would run about and go a bit mad. They had toys and games to play with. They also had access to books. The teacher had a bookcase with good books in it that could be looked at under supervision.
21. We gave the children pocket money for going to the shops. They often went out with the staff to local shops in the town.

Trips / Holidays

22. During the summer, the nursery children had a holiday in Fairlie in Ayrshire in a guesthouse, near to the sea. The children went to the beach and I went into the water with them. This happened every year for the nursery children and babies. The trip was sponsored by a group of people who supported Nazareth House.

Birthdays and Christmas

23. When it was a child's birthday, we always celebrated it. We got a cake with candles and had a tea party for them. They would get a present as well.
24. The children in the nursery had a lovely Christmas and lots of presents on their bed. It was hard to get them to sleep at night. People from outside the house were very generous and bought them toys. The children were able to keep their own toys and they stored them in trays under their beds.

Visits / Inspections

25. I have no memory of an external inspection during my time at Cardonald.
26. Nuns from the Order came in for visitations. They came to see that we were carrying out the apostolate appropriately throughout the house, including the elderly care home. They wouldn't know anything about children. Their visit was not detailed. They would talk with me and might talk to the children and observe meal times. I got no feedback from them, if anything I gave them the feedback. I don't know if they had any training in childcare.
27. The children could be visited by friends and family. I recall one father who visited his two children every Sunday. Their mother had died and he could not cope with the two children by himself. Other children got visits very rarely. The social workers did not follow that up with the families and communicate with them. This kind of thing was managed by the social workers and not by us. There was no visitor's book. I had no books of any kind to record events in.
28. With regard to encouraging contact by parents with their children through other means, such as telephone calls or birthday cards, I can't recall that happening.

29. There were no unsupervised visits with the children from outside of the family. No-one from the local community came in to see the children unsupervised. We worked in an open plan environment and could have observed any contact by outsiders.
30. I am not aware of any review of the children's placement by the social workers. I'm not aware of any work being done to try to get them placed back at home. When a child turned four they went up to the children's section, even if they still had a younger sibling in the nursery. I argued against this and did not succeed. The older child would be settled in the new older group. I don't know if they were allowed to come and visit their younger sibling in the nursery, and in my view, not enough effort was made to maintain their contact. When the younger sibling turned four they moved to the children's section and joined the same group as their older brother or sister.
31. I had nothing to do with the discharge of children from Nazareth House. We might get a call to say that a particular child in our care was leaving at a certain time. We would get them dressed and ready. I had no input in a child going back to their family. I didn't see any ledger or book recording discharges, but I'm sure there must have been one. I was a junior staff member with no say in these matters.

Healthcare

32. There wasn't a nurse based in the nursery. I remember the children being healthy and not prone to sickness. They might have had measles or something like that, but nothing serious enough to get a nurse in.
33. I don't recall any medical check-ups for the nursery children, but there must have been something because they would have had injections at that age. Some of the children had been badly neglected before they came into our care. I cannot recall the doctor coming in to them, but they must have seen a doctor who would come in to see them. I think Sister LFL would have organised the medical care and it wasn't part of my role.

34. I don't recall the children having dental care. It would have been organised by Sister LFL if they had to see a dentist.
35. No child died in the nursery in my time at Cardonald, and I never read anything about a procedure to put in place if that happened.

Religion

36. Most of the children in the nursery were Catholic. They said grace before meals and went to Mass on Sundays. I objected to that because the young children didn't understand what was going on, and could not stay quiet.

Chores

37. The children in the nursery were too young to be able to do any chores.

Discipline

38. There was nothing in writing about how discipline should be managed. There were no rules of behaviour that a child had to follow and no written, or unwritten rules on how to deal with discipline either. You might smack the back of a child's hand with your own hand, or tell a child to stay still for a while or stand outside of a door if they were badly behaved. There were no physical punishments. No implements were used to discipline a child in the nursery. The three of us on duty would deal with these matters. If you walked into a room and a child was misbehaving you would deal with the issue automatically.

Previous statements

39. I never gave any statement before this one about my time at Cardonald. I have never been questioned by the police or given a statement to them about any events in Cardonald.

Abuse at Nazareth House, Cardonald

40. I did not witness any abusive behaviour towards children in my group and I did not witness abuse in any of the other groups in Cardonald. I didn't see any of the other groups. The nursery was based on the ground floor, to the right hand side of the front door of the main house. Along the corridor were the stairs to the bedrooms for the other groups. It was just the sitting room for the other groups that was on the ground floor and I never went in there.
41. I never came across a child who felt the need to approach a staff member to say they had been ill-treated. I think the children in the nursery were too young to recognise ill-treatment. If the child was having difficulties, he or she could go to the people who took care of them and I am not aware of any concerns being raised. We lived in a closed environment.
42. On the question of whether I was aware of things happening at Cardonald that seemed acceptable then, but with the benefit of hindsight would be regarded as abusive now. No, I am not aware. For the times we lived in then, we gave as good a life as possible to children who were living in care. They had good food, clothing and an education to prepare them for senior school.
43. I have been advised that an allegation of abuse has been made against me by a former resident of Cardonald called [REDACTED] LBS [REDACTED]. She was at Nazareth House from [REDACTED] 1962 to [REDACTED] 1970. I recall that name. She was not in my care and I cannot recall which group she was in. I think she was aged eight or nine when I knew her. I have a good memory for the names of the children. I may have encountered [REDACTED] LBS [REDACTED] if she was friendly with someone in my group, but I'm not sure. She had nothing to do with me otherwise.
44. [REDACTED] LBS [REDACTED] has said in her statement that *"none of the nuns showed kindness, even the babies got hit. My friend told me she had seen the babies about two years old being hit with wooden spoons by [REDACTED] LFT [REDACTED].* We didn't have wooden spoons in the nursery. I am not aware of any child being hit with wooden spoons. I

don't believe the passage of time has affected my memory and I don't know why people would make up this allegation.

45. I have been asked to comment on the behaviour towards children of various sisters and staff members at Cardonald at the same time as me.
46. With regard to Sister [LFP] she was elderly at that time. She did not have much patience with children and would shout at them. She was in Cardonald all of the time I was there. She looked after a group of children. I'm not aware of her being known by any other name. There were three groups of children in the upstairs bedrooms and I never went up there. The groups were run by Sister [LFL] Sister [LFP] and Sister [LFS]
47. The groups had girls only in them and were of mixed ages. I'm not sure where the boys went after the nursery. Their sitting room was on the ground floor and the bedrooms upstairs. I didn't know Sister [LFP] apart from through the community. I don't know how she was with children. I didn't see anything, but I heard the odd shout from her.
48. With regard to [LFQ] I can't place her, she must have been on the staff somewhere in Nazareth House. Her name doesn't mean anything to me.
49. I have been asked to comment on the behaviour of a Dr [REDACTED]. I have no knowledge of him.
50. Similarly, I have no knowledge of the behaviour of a dentist called Dr [LGG]
51. With regard to Sister [LFL] she was in overall charge of all of the children, as well as having her own group. She would correct children if they were running up and down the corridor. She would shout. She was my senior, and somebody to be feared for me as I was so young. I think she was in her late 50s when I knew her and I am not aware of her using any other name. I didn't see her with the children. I did not hear of her behaving towards the children in an abusive manner.

52. Sister [LFH] was not in Cardonald during my time working there. I don't know if she was at Cardonald before or after me.
53. I have been asked about someone called [LFU], who was a weekend foster carer. The babies did not go out to foster families so I would not have known him. I recall that two babies were adopted by people known to Nazareth House, but that was all.
54. With regard to Sister [LFS] she was younger than me. She was not known by any other name. She entered the order younger than me. She was in the novitiate with me. She was a young and vibrant sister who was full of enthusiasm. I never heard of any abusive behaviour by her towards children.
55. I don't know the name [LFN] who I am told was a foster carer.
56. I have been asked to comment on a Sister [LHA] and I am not sure if I know her name. I don't specifically recall a Sister [LHA] but the name rings a bell for me and the person I am thinking of left the Order.
57. I do not recall the name Miss [LGF] who I am told was a carer,
58. I also do not recall the name Mr [LGH] who I am told was a foster carer.
59. I do not recall any other names of staff members or sisters who worked at Cardonald at the same time as me. I only knew my own staff and wouldn't know the staff in other groups.

Records

60. There were no books or records kept in the nursery. In relation to my group, I kept no records. If there were records they would be kept by Sister [LFL]. There was no

punishment book. I don't know why there wasn't one and no-one discussed it with me. I don't know anything about any other records.

Leaving Nazareth House, Cardonald

61. I left Cardonald in 1970 and went to Isleworth for short time, before spending fifteen years in Nazareth House at Plymouth.

62. I have been asked to comment on how it is that the Inquiry has heard so many allegations of childhood abuse made against Sisters and staff. I can only say the people who have approached the Inquiry are damaged people. They had no family of their own and have a very big chip on their shoulder as a result. There was no reason for them to be abused. I'm not sure how the children were treated at Cardonald, I only saw the nursery children. They had a longing for knowledge of their identity and this would have a big impact on their adult lives. It would have been very traumatic to grow up in an institution where no-one visits you, and you don't belong to anybody. They may well have grudges against the people who brought them up in care.

63. I have been asked to comment on how it is that so many people have told the Inquiry about the long term effects of childhood abuse on them as adults if it did not happen. There may have been a combination of things, from abuse by parents before they came into Nazareth House. It could have been the progression of a number of things in their lives and they think back to what a nun did to them as a child and blame her. In fact, they got good food and education, but this did not make up for what they were lacking from their childhood. No-one went out of their way to be cruel to them. Lots of babies had traumatic lives before they were aged three. It was how they grew up, no-one came to visit them at Christmas or on birthdays. It wasn't the nuns, it was their family background at fault.

64. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

LFT


Signed.....

Dated..... *26th April 2018*.....