

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

AAV

Support person present: No

1. My name is AAV and my date of birth is 1960. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I lived in the Drumchapel area of Glasgow with my parents. My father's name was my mother was
3. My mother had been born a Protestant and my dad's family were Catholic. I think there had been some friction when they got married. My mother's father had been a member of the Orange Lodge and was not happy that my mother was marrying a Catholic.
4. In terms of family life, it was nothing other than relatively happy. I had an older brother Next in line was my sister died the next year. She was only 8 months old. I was born on 1960. My younger sister she was born on Growing up during that early period, I remember my older brother My younger sister was a toddler.
5. We stayed at Drumchapel. It was a 1950's peripheral housing estate. We lived in a tenement block. We were on the ground floor and there were six flats in that particular block.

██████████ I had relatives, my uncle ██████████ and aunt ██████████ who lived close by ██████████
██████████

6. My mother committed suicide in ██████████ 1965. My recollection of life before my mother passed away was relatively happy. I have fond memories of being out and about. Although it was a housing estate on the fringes of Glasgow, it was on the edges of the countryside and we used to ramble about.
7. When I was four years of age, I had chicken pox. I was at home recovering from it when my mother decided to take her life. I had been in the next room. I don't have any startling recollection of discovering my mother, other than being really upset and wondering what was going on. ██████████
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8. I think she was going through some post-natal depression. My dad worked abroad in the ██████████ That might have had some sort of impact on the loneliness of being a mum, looking after three kids and having suffered a trauma of losing a child a few years earlier. That's when it all kicked off for me.
9. I don't think my dad could cope after my mother's death. I stayed with my aunt ██████████ and my uncle ██████████ after the death of my mother. ██████████ and I were only there for a few weeks. Someone came to take me away. I remember clinging on to the leg of my uncle ██████████ for dear life. My brother ██████████ was on his other leg. I think that my aunt ██████████ and uncle ██████████ looked after my sister ██████████ for 6 months after my mother died.
10. I remember being taken away from my aunt and uncle. I'm sure it was the winter. I remember being bundled into a Commer van. It had seats in it. I remember looking out the window and I could see it was getting dark. I did not understand what was going on. I remember I was crying. I was shouting "I want my mammy, I want Mammy." I can't recollect my dad being there when we were being taken away. I remember feeling hurt and fear. It was a pretty traumatic experience. I don't remember who the people were who took me away.

Smyllum, Lanark

11. My brother [REDACTED] and I were taken to Smyllum in Lanark. I have no recollection of my sister [REDACTED] being there but I have been told since by relatives that [REDACTED] was there too. I didn't have much contact with my brother in Smyllum. We were to stay there for about six months. We were being looked after by nuns.

12. I don't know who arranged for us to be taken to Smyllum. For some reason I think an old family friend, Mrs [REDACTED] may have had something to do with it. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Her daughter was a nun, Sister [REDACTED] I think they may have had some input into [REDACTED] and I going to Smyllum but I can't be certain of this.

13. I get very upset with myself that I have not carried out much research into my past. I have a degree in Information Science and have access and the ability to carry out in-depth research. I have carried out some research into my mother's death but nothing else. I think this may be my way of keeping my time at Smyllum in the dark crevices of my mind.

Routine at Smyllum

14. I don't remember arriving at Smyllum. I think I cried myself to some sort of semblance of sleep during the journey there. I don't remember any meeting or greeting on arrival. I just have this overarching memory of it being a threatening and unwelcoming place.

15. I remember the place itself. It was a big expanse of a place and I remember there was a courtyard. I remember being able to move about the place. I was able to walk through the courtyards and I remember coming round a corner and seeing the end of the building. I can't remember actual features of the place.

16. On arrival, I am pretty sure I was still upset and inconsolable. I was never offered a little cuddle or a shoulder to cry on. There was no sense of wellbeing or any consideration given to your wellbeing.

Mornings and bedtimes

17. I can remember getting up very early. I don't particularly know what time, it was early doors. It would be still relatively dark when you were getting roused and getting washed. We had to get clean and were given a change of clothes. I don't even know what kind of clothing we wore. I have some recollection in my head about wearing dungarees, but I don't know if this was just something I liked wearing as a child.
18. I think prayers were a feature of the morning routine. We had early morning prayer and evening type prayers. I think we were issued to bed relatively quick after some sort of evening meal.
19. We slept in dormitories. It was only boys in my dormitory. I have no recollection of seeing any girls. I remember rows of beds in the room. The dorm was a dark room. It had dark wooden doors and a bit of wood panelling. It was very austere with relatively light paint work between the windows. I'm not sure if my brother was in the dorm with me. We had no real contact in the home.

Food

20. We ate our food in the dining hall. The dining hall was also a dark room with dark wood panelling. I can't remember much about the food. I just remember the food as being unappealing. I don't remember anything good about the place.

School

21. I think I was too young to go to school. I have no recollection of being taught anything in a school or a pre-school place. I heard others talking about going to the local school but I have no recollection of going.

Holidays

22. I remember being taken to St Andrews during my time at Smyllum. I think we were taken during the summer. I'm not sure if it was a day trip or if it was a holiday. I ran away from the nuns and I remember hiding. I was hiding behind someone's gate to their garden. There was a hedge to my right and I remember looking through the iron gate. I could see the nuns having a chat at the bus and I knew they were looking for me. I was longing for the bus to disappear and I would be left behind. The person who owned the house came out and asked what was going on. This attracted the attention of the nuns. I was bundled back onto the bus and taken back to Smyllum.
23. I had to sit at a window seat near the front entrance of the bus. I remember it well. It was an old, 1960s-style, single decker bus. I remember being pushed to the side and a nun sitting down beside me. I was struggling and crying. I was very upset. I was dreading what would happen to me on my arrival back at Smyllum. I was beaten up when I returned.

Birthdays/Christmas

24. I don't remember celebrating my birthday or Christmas in Smyllum. My birthday is in [REDACTED] and I don't think we were there long enough for it to be my birthday or Christmas.

Visits/inspections

25. I think my aunt [REDACTED] and uncle [REDACTED] came to visit me when I was in St Andrews. They were staying in a caravan nearby. My aunt also visited me in Smyllum. She

said later in life that she knew from the look of fear in my eyes that there was something amiss.

Healthcare

26. I don't remember being ill at Smyllum. I do remember being examined by someone shortly after I arrived at the home. I don't think this examination was necessarily carried out by a doctor or a nurse. It was the nuns that looked after us.

Abuse at Smyllum, Lanark

27. I remember being beaten up by the nuns. This happened regularly. Sometimes there was more than one nun involved in the beating. One would hold you and another nun would hit you. I remember being struck with wooden coat hangers. The beatings were often. The nuns were callous and they never smiled. I hated them. The punishments were frequent and the beatings were thunderous.
28. I also hated getting a bath. It was used as a form of punishment. They used freezing cold water. I remember being forced into the bath. I can remember being pushed and prodded by the nuns into the cold bath. I don't know the reason why the water had to be so cold. In the morning when we washed ourselves the water was never that cold. It was not like the place did not have warm water.
29. The baths tubs were ceramic or tin. They were in a smallish room and they had been pre-prepared. There were also buckets of additional water. You were forced into the cold water and I remember shivering. I am now a volunteer sports coach and I've often wondered if the cold baths were something to do with a cruel recovery to mask bruising and injury.
30. I was intrigued by the outfits that the nuns wore. They wore long robes that were really dark blue. They didn't wear the big fancy head-dresses this order traditionally wore. When they walked it looked like they were floating. I could see their feet had

leather boots on them, but they didn't seem to walk. I was a curious child and wanted to know what was going on under the skirts so on one occasion, I tried to look up under the skirts to see if they had legs. I remember getting a beating for that.

31. I was taken away and struck lots of times with what appeared to be a wooden coat hanger. I was struck across the back of my legs from the calves up to my thighs if I tried to run away. I remember getting battered across the lower arms as I tried to protect myself. I was also struck on my lower back and on the spine. I also remember the nuns attempting to kick me while I was on the floor. There was more than one person involved. One nun would be trying to catch you, grabbing and kicking, while the other nun was beating you. I can't recall any misdemeanour that would warrant that level of beating, other than I wanted my mother and I did not want to be there.
32. My lasting memory of being in Smyllum is just the utter loneliness I felt. I felt like the loneliest person there even though I was surrounded by other young people, nuns and priests. I often wondered if it was just me that felt that way or whether others were going through something similar. Being there was just physical, emotional and mental torture. The frozen baths and the beatings with the wooden coat hangers were brutal. The nuns would say things like "Your ma has left you for good." I didn't know what they meant by this. They were cruel, evil people.
33. I remember there were other people there as staff. There were people who were not nuns, there was people there working. There was pretty extensive gardens in Smyllum. It had a big, walled garden of some description. There were certainly people there growing things, or tending to things that were being grown, vegetables. There were women serving us food. I don't remember details, faces or names.
34. I remember pottering about in the gardens. There was a man who worked in the garden and I don't know if I was helping him or being nosey but I remember spending time with him. I don't remember being forced into doing any chores. I know I have blocked a lot out, like the faces and names.

Bed-wetting

35. I was a frequent bed-wetter during and after my time in Smyllum. It was just something in my make-up, I could not control it. I think the nuns did night time inspections of the beds. I would be dragged away and beaten up for wetting the bed. The sheets would be taken off the bed. I think that is why I was beaten so often.
36. Thinking back now, I wonder if the cruel, freezing cold baths were some sort of punishment for my bed-wetting. That is just something I have only begun to think about.

Leaving Smyllum

37. I left Smyllum after about six months, it might have been longer. I have requested information by email from the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul. They have not responded. I don't actually remember leaving. I went to live with my aunt [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Glasgow.
38. I remember meeting up with my sister [REDACTED]. She was like a stranger to me. She was somebody that I had to get to know all over again. There was this stand-offish-ness of two young people not knowing who the other person was. Some people in my family have told me that [REDACTED] was in Smyllum with [REDACTED] and I but I have no recollection of [REDACTED] being there. It would make more sense to me that she stayed at an aunt's house.

Life after being in care

39. After Smyllum, I started St Sixtus Primary School, Drumchapel. It was a catholic primary school. I'm not sure if this was a winter or summer intake in 1966. I do remember an older female taking me to school.
40. My father had started a new relationship with a woman called [REDACTED]. She eventually married my father and she took on his three kids. My brother, sister and I returned home. [REDACTED] became my mother. My father and [REDACTED] had a child together, [REDACTED]. We were back living in Drumchapel by then.
41. [REDACTED] and my father did not marry immediately. They co-habited together. The local church in Drumchapel made it really difficult for my family. [REDACTED] and I used to bunk off going to church on a Sunday. If we did go, we would keep the money that we were supposed to put into the church collection. The priests used to come down to our house and harass [REDACTED] and my dad for us not attending church.
42. The priests used to tell my dad that it was shocking that he was living with a divorcee. My dad married [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] 1974. My brother [REDACTED] was an illegitimate child until they married. The priest used to call [REDACTED] "that bastard child." The parish priest was Irish. He had a similar accent to the nuns in Smyllum. There was a certain harshness to their accent. It was not a soft Dublin accent.
43. I remember an incident when I was in primary school. The teacher would ask the class who had not attended church the previous Sunday. I didn't want to lie. It took me back to my time in Smyllum. The nuns would ask if I had wet the bed and if I lied I would get a battering. When the teacher asked who in the class had not gone to church, I told the truth and I put up my hand. The teacher decided to take me out of my chair and desk and I was made to stand on a chair in a corner. I was told to face into the corner. I was not allowed to speak. I needed to go to the toilet. I was too scared to ask and I soiled myself. I was in shorts and I was a mess. I felt humiliated. I remember being in such a state. I was wearing shorts and the mess was obvious. The ridicule was horrendous from the other kids at the school. Someone from my family was called to take me away and to clean me up. I think one of my cousins came. I remember being dragged along the street.

44. In 1967, my half-brother [REDACTED] was born. I remember it well. We became a family unit. I was still wetting the bed. I was taken to a new doctor in Clydebank. They were trying to figure out why I was wetting the bed. It is pretty obvious now, it was due to the trauma from my time in Smyllum.
45. I remember being in hospital as a child. I'm sure it was round about the time [REDACTED] was born. It has been suggested by family members that I fell down a flight of stairs. There was a problem with my leg and tests were being carried out by the doctors. I was in hospital for a long time and weights were attached to my leg to pull it down. I was then using crutches on my return home. It was discovered that I had Perthes' disease. It is a childhood disease which affects the hip. I believe the trauma from the nuns hitting me constantly with the wooden hangers contributed to the difficulties with my hip. The hip was one of the places that the nuns would hit you.
46. I left school after completing my sixth year of school. I went over to [REDACTED] to visit an aunt. When I returned, I was supposed to start at Glasgow Tech but my place had been given away I was unemployed for a while and then got a job with [REDACTED] the libraries department. I went to night school and passed my exams that allowed me to go to [REDACTED] University to study Information Science and Librarianship. I returned to Glasgow with my degree and started working [REDACTED] I became a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in Scotland.
47. I now work as a [REDACTED] My job is to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to use digital career management skills.
48. I met my wife [REDACTED] the day I started as a library assistant at a local library. We have two children together, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. We are a close family.

Reporting of abuse

49. I don't think I spoke to anyone at the time about what was happening to me in Smyllum. I wasn't able to communicate anything to anyone. When my aunt and uncle came to visit me, I was pleased to see them. I would sob and cry. I was probably still wanting my mother.
50. As I got older, I don't think I have shared my experiences of Smyllum to anyone other than [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My best friends [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] know something traumatic happened to me as a child and I was placed in a home. They have never pushed me to tell them more.
51. I once wrote a letter of complaint to the Bishop of [REDACTED]. He offered counselling but I'm just not interested.
52. I've never reported my abuse in Smyllum to the police. In the back of my head, I have always thought that I didn't have any real facts. I don't know any names and I don't have facial recognition of my abusers.

Impact

53. I have this deep dislike towards nuns and I have this aversion towards religion in general. I remember taking my first communion and I thought it was a bizarre experience. My father was a Catholic and he found his religion again when he retired. He would attend mass every morning. I just couldn't understand it. [REDACTED] became a Catholic after she was upset about her own church, Govan Parish Church, being amalgamated with two other churches. She thought I was going to be upset about her confirmation. I told her it was her religion and I respected her wishes. I attended [REDACTED] confirmation. I have also attended dozens of funerals in Catholic churches but I'm not interested in religion in the slightest.
54. My father passed away in May this year. I had to arrange my father's funeral. I respected his wishes and the funeral was held in his church. I was never able to speak to him about my time in Smyllum.

55. I have a fear of women walking about with headdresses and veils. I was on holiday with my wife [REDACTED] and my daughter [REDACTED] in Italy. We came across a group of nuns and it scared me to death. My wife and daughter were not expecting this reaction from me and were trying to be humorous about it. It was not a funny experience for me.
56. I had a similar experience in London when I visited Madame Tussaud's. There were a group of women wearing burkhas. I was scared and it brought something back in my mind from my time in Smyllum. I was not comfortable in their presence.
57. It's not just the Catholic religion that I have an aversion to. My best friend [REDACTED] became a lay Baptist preacher. I went to his ceremony but I wasn't impressed by that whole experience. I just thought it was artificial and superficial. I remember having a chat with [REDACTED] two children about religion. I went into this tirade about religion and how God was a man-made device to try and control people. My other best friend [REDACTED] is a principal teacher in a Catholic school. We both have our views on education and religion. I wouldn't go out of my way to disrespect people of that particular faith.
58. My wife and I have visited St Andrews a few times. I know exactly the place where I hid from the nuns. When I see it, I get a feeling that is hard to explain. It's not a nice feeling.
59. I also believe the physical punishments from the nuns beating me with the wooden hangers has contributed to my [REDACTED] disease. I was an energetic child. I was able to play football relatively competently even at a young age. As I grew older, I was never able to progress due to the weakness in my right hip. When coaches heard that I had a difficulty with my [REDACTED] they just walked away. I am a [REDACTED] now as I have always had a passion for football. I was never able to fulfil my dream of becoming a professional footballer.

60. I was a painfully shy child. I think I went into my shell after I returned home after my time in Smyllum. I was intelligent and quite bookish.
61. I am not close to either of my brothers or my sister. We have never spoken to each other about our childhood experiences. My sister has suffered from mental health issues later on in her life. My brother [REDACTED] was a reckless adolescent.
62. We have been speaking recently as I had to organise my father's funeral. We have all gone our separate ways. I've never felt the need to be close to them perhaps due to my experiences in Smyllum. We were separated when I was there and we have never been close since. I am closer to my own family, my wife and kids. I also feel closer to my two best friends, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They're more like brothers to me.
63. I was never able to speak to my family about my time in Smyllum. I have so many questions that I would like to ask. I could ask my aunt [REDACTED] and uncle [REDACTED] but they are both getting on. I can't speak to my uncle [REDACTED] about Smyllum for some reason, I find it hard to bring up my time in care. I get very angry at myself as I have all these tools to investigate my past but for some reason I've never carried out extensive research. I am an inquisitive person who likes to seek out knowledge but I haven't investigated my own past.
64. The only person I will really speak to about my time in care is my wife. My kids know I was in care and that I have an aversion to nuns and religion in general.
65. I've never had counselling. I've dealt with the trauma from my childhood in my own way over the years.

Records

66. I would like to see my records from my time in Smyllum. Everything is still so confused in my mind about that time. I'm not even sure exactly how long I was there for. I want to know exactly when I went in and when I came out. This information

66. I would like to see my records from my time in Smyllum. Everything is still so confused in my mind about that time. I'm not even sure exactly how long I was there for. I want to know exactly when I went in and when I came out. This information should help me start to put things together. I have emailed the authorities to try and get them to provide this information

Hopes for the Inquiry

67. I am well aware that the people involved in the mistreatment have long since died or are extremely elderly. I wonder who is going to take responsibility for their actions. Would it be the Catholic Church? Abuse at that time seemed to be institutionalised. It was allowed to happen due to many factors. For example, poor or no child care training, inadequate people skills, lack of monitoring or regulation, incompetency, complacency and worst of all, covering up by organisations who are meant to be intrinsically good and care for the health and well-being of fellow humans. I was four years old when they did this to me. That's no way to treat vulnerable human beings. People should be asking questions about what is going on. I'm disappointed in myself for doing nothing, for not seeking out about my past.

68. 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.

AAV


Signed.....

Dated..... Monday 28th August 2017