

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GBL [REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is GBL [REDACTED] and my date of birth is [REDACTED] 1965. My contact details are known to the inquiry.

Background

2. I have lived at my current address for about fifteen years and am working as a learning assistant at [REDACTED] Primary School. I have a partner, [REDACTED], who I have been going out with for about two years. I have four children. My mother [REDACTED] is still alive. My dad is dead.
3. I have three sisters and two brothers. I had another sister but she has passed away. Three of my sisters were in the home with me. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
4. I first went to Bloomhill Children's Home in Cardross, aged twelve from 1977 to 1980, I then went to Hill Park Children's Home, Hardgate in Clydebank for about three years then Cardross Park Assessment Centre in 1983 for about six months then Craigellachie Children's Home, Whitecrook in 1983 for two years until I was seventeen and a half.


Life before care

5. My father died, and that is when my mum started drinking and then started selling things in the house. We were unkempt looking and probably mostly cared for ourselves. My older sisters and brothers were looking after us too and kept us afloat for a while, but they were getting on with their lives. My brother took my father's death very badly and he went off the rails.
6. There were parties in the house and it wasn't right for our safety that we were seeing what went on at these parties. The social work got involved, and a social worker Stella Scott came along. I remember her and she had a fluffy hat on with a pin in it, and another social worker called Graham Beattie. I remember when they came my mum was drunk and they wanted her to sign a form. Basically the social work were there to take us away so me and two of my sisters ran out the house and hid. We saw them take my wee sister away. We went back after it was all clear and we stayed in the house that night but we got taken away the next day. We were all taken to Bloomhill Children's Home.

Bloomhill Children's Home, Carman Road, Cardross

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Hill Park Children's Home, Stewart Drive, Hardgate, Clydebank

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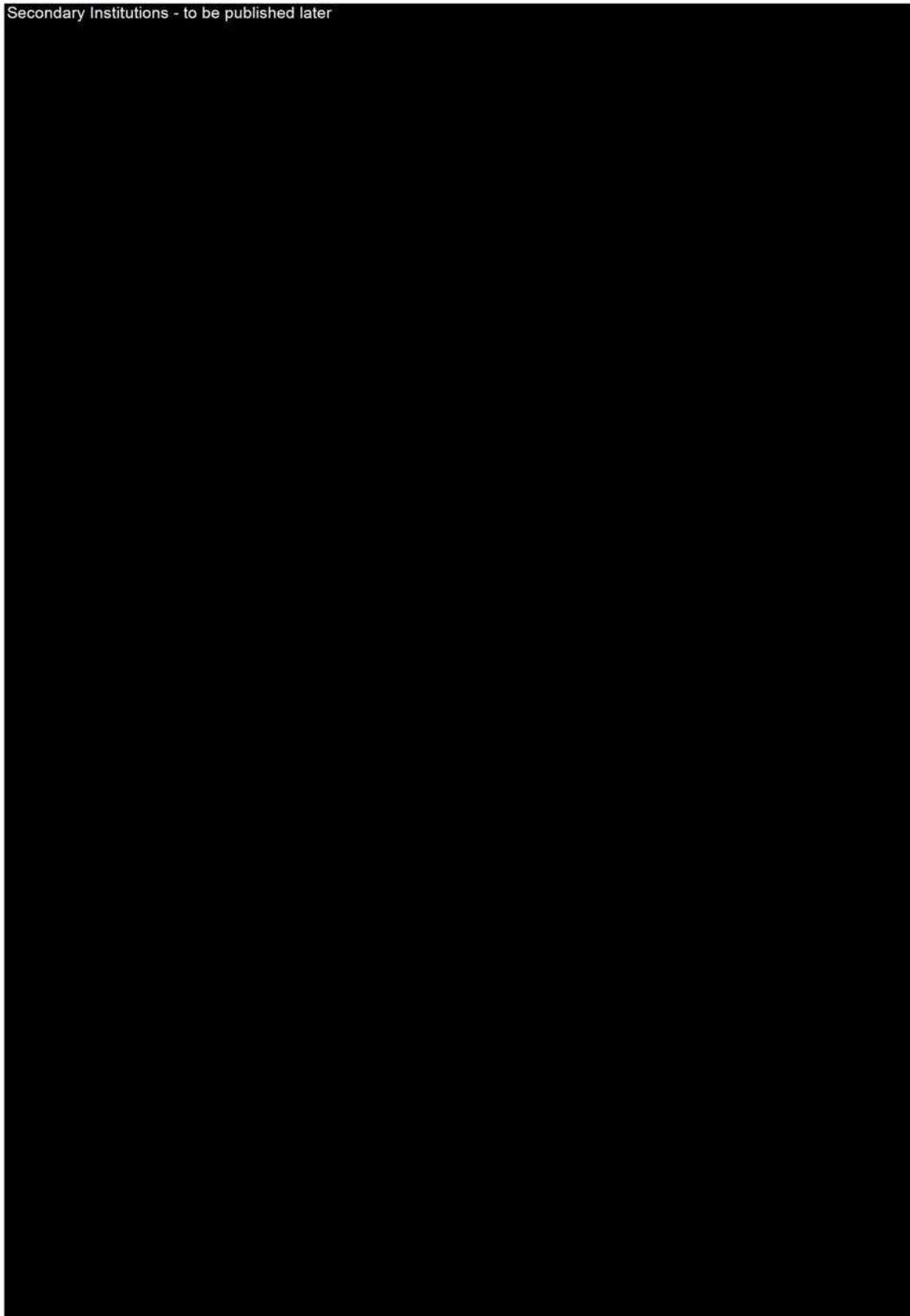
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Cardross Park Assessment Centre, Dumbarton

43. Cardross was a big house and it had a big day room and a big chill out room and there was a classroom. There was a spiral staircase leading up to the bedrooms. It was mixed with boys and girls. It was a secure home and it was like a jail. The front door was locked and the windows were sealed and you couldn't get out. There was a blue room which they showed us and they told us if we carried on we would be locked in there. It had painted blue walls, two blue benches, and two locked doors, there were no windows. You had to walk through this room to get to the dining room. I think I ended up at Cardross for eight or nine months. This was the worst time of my life. zIBD zIBD was the man who SNR. There were probably fifteen or sixteen children at Cardross ranging from twelve up to sixteen. I think there were maybe in total eight members of staff. There was an old man in there who was nice and he used to teach us how to play table tennis. He lived in the nearby village and I think he was a member of staff.

Mealtimes

44. Food at Cardross was alright. We got breakfast and then dinner at night which might be pizza and chips. We got our lunch at school.

Bedtime

45. The boys and the girls slept in different rooms, and there were about five girls in my room and probably the same in the boys but I was never in there. There was a big door between the rooms but it didn't lock.

Washing and bathing

46. I am not sure but I think there was one bath in there.

Leisure

47. There was a big wall around the house so we were allowed out there to play football sometimes, and that's where Owen Lilley a member of staff would give us a fly cigarette to smoke. We were allowed four cigarettes every day. We sometimes got taken by the staff to the local shops. We stood out because we had to walk in twos behind the member of staff and we had to wear these wee black plimsole shoes. The locals used to shout at us, and for some reason they were calling us murderers. It made me feel as if I had done something really, really bad.
48. One time a whole lot of Boys from Bellfield Home in Dumbarton came up for a disco. One of the boys kept pestering me for a dance but I kept running away from him, I was frightened of him but the staff just thought it was funny.

Trips / Excursions

49. I remember getting taken to Helensburgh to go to the picture hall because I remember watching the film Jaws.

Christmas / Birthdays

50. I remember a Christmas tree and presents underneath it but to be honest I don't remember any of the presents being for me.

Work

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Schooling

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We went to the classroom in the home for our education. The teachers just told us that we were thick and useless and would never achieve anything with our lives, and would never get a job. I just replied that I would get a good job and that I wouldn't be locked in.

Visits

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When I went to Cardross my sisters stayed at Hill Park at Hardgate and I never got to see them

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I never got any visits from my mum but that was possibly because of pressure from her partner then. We used to sit at the window looking down the long drive on the Saturday watching other children's parents coming to visit them but we never got any visitors.

Abuse - Cardross Park Assessment Centre

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I remember seeing one of the girls running away and I knew she wouldn't get far. Two members of staff caught her and they stripped her naked and they tied her to a bed. I walked past the door and I heard her screaming and shouting and I saw the two female members of staff pulling her clothes off and she was naked and she was getting tied to the bed. When they saw me one of the female members of staff slammed the door shut. I never spoke to that girl about it later on.

55. I developed a bit of a stutter when I was there and I fell out with another girl and we ended up fighting. Because of this I got put in the blue room for punishment. This room was like a cell and it was used to cool you down. I think I was in there for three hours but it felt like 24 hours. I didn't see anyone else getting put in there. I can't remember who put me in there but it was the same person who let me out.

Leaving - Cardross Park Assessment Centre

56. I kept on and on at my social worker that I hadn't done anything wrong and that I shouldn't even be there and asked him if there was any chance of getting to go back to a normal home. They kept saying they would see about it.

Craigellachie Children's Home, Whitecrook, Clydebank

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New Cardross Park Assessment Centre

71. The new Cardross Park Assessment Centre was a new purpose built building in the same grounds of the old unit and was totally secure. It had a pool table, and a table tennis table and the home was for both boys and girls. At the new Cardross unit we each had our own rooms which were locked. All that was in our room was a chest of drawers a bed and a table. When I was in there I tried to speak to a girl in the room next to me so I opened my window but it smashed and I cut my arm and I got rushed to the hospital. I think they had showers at Cardross but to be honest I can't remember using them. There was a television in the hall so we had to go in there if we wanted to watch it.
72. I think I was there for about nine months. I am sure I was kept there to keep me quiet so nobody found out about the member of staff's husband being drunk and assaulting me in the old Cardross.
73. I can't really remember much about my time at the new Cardross Park Assessment Centre and I just really remember that it was really strict.

Craigellachie – second visit

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Reporting of Abuse - General

75. I have told my own children about some of what happened to me in care but today is the first time that I have actually sat down and told anyone in as much detail about my childhood.
76. There is no one in any of the homes I was in that I could have gone to and talked to about anything. I didn't have a close relationship with any of the members of staff. I just resented the staff because all I wanted was my mother.
77. I have never spoken to the police either because I don't think they would listen to me.

Supervision

78. I rarely saw my Social Worker Graham Beattie and only saw him maybe three times in a year. Occasionally I would tell staff that I needed my social worker and he did eventually come to see me. I never saw him at any of the residential homes. Any issues that I told him about nothing ever changed and he never did anything about it. He was my social worker from the day I got taken off my mother until I left care.

Life after care

79. I left Craigellachie some-time between sixteen and a half and seventeen and a half and I got a flat. I wrote a letter to the housing department, and I remember one of the members of staff telling me to do this and helped me write the letter. I got a flat and I got a grant. I got a job at an old folk's home and my sister came to live with me for a while. I didn't have any follow up care or visits from the social work department. I found it really difficult to cope on my own and I started drinking alcohol. I tried to get back into the home but I was told I was too old.
80. I went off the rails for a while and I lost my job and nearly lost my kids and my house. I realised I needed to do something so I went to college because I did a lot of voluntary child care. I went to college and did a course called Physical Development Award which covers children from birth up to sixteen years old. I already had a job by then as a Special Educational Needs learning assistant in school. This is an award that all classroom assistants must have. I still work part-time at a school.

Impact

81. I don't know why I went to a secure home at Cardross Park Assessment Centre because I didn't think I had done anything to deserve it. When I got moved from Hill Park to Cardross Assessment Centre my sisters stayed at Hill Park and I rarely saw them again after that. I really missed them.
82. I missed out on a lot of education when I was in care because I was never there. I was told that I had to go to school but it was quite relaxed and I told them I didn't want to go but they didn't force me to go. I taught myself more after I left care.
83. As soon as I left the care system and got my own flat I started drinking too much alcohol. I was drinking every night, sometimes a bottle of vodka every night or if I couldn't afford it cider. If I could have got more drink I would drink it. If people brought more drink to the house I would drink it. I never sought any medical help or advice in

relation to my drinking so was never diagnosed as being an alcoholic. I think I probably was an alcoholic.

84. When I was in the flat on my own, before I had my daughter, I was in a bad place and twice I took an overdose of tablets but after I had done it I phoned my sister's house. I don't really think they were serious attempts and I suppose they were just cries for help. I have occasionally thought about harming myself since then but not in the last ten years because I am just too busy.
85. I started drinking so much when I left care because I wanted to block out what had happened to me and block out life because I was left to my own devices with no help from anybody. I was a lost cause and felt sorry for myself. I was very tearful and cried quite a lot and my children when they were growing up often heard me crying.
86. I had my first baby when I was nineteen and that's when I stopped drinking so much. I did stop drinking for a while after I moved house again and started again but when the housing officer came and the social work said they were going to take the kids off me, that's when I really stopped drinking and now only drink at the weekends.
87. I hated the social work for years after I was taken into care. They got my mother to sign the form to take us away and put us into care when she was drunk and that was wrong. I don't think she was given the chance to sober up and sort herself out before they took us off her. I have got no time for authority and resent the mention of the social work department. I don't trust them and feel that they just tell lies. I felt I did nothing wrong and I got treated badly. I still feel the same towards social workers because I have been dealing with them through getting custody of my grandchildren. I felt the same towards the police because I ended up in the cells a few times through my drinking.
88. I used to feel quite depressed now and again but I know I am quite a strong person and I pick myself up and get on with it. I have never been diagnosed with depression. Sometimes I just feel sad about life and feel like I want to scream. I have always felt worthless probably because of the way I was treated when I was younger, and being brought up in a regimented way with no love or affection.

89. I get anxious at times but it is getting better now. I used to avoid going in lifts or going into big crowds. Quite often I will wake up through the night and think there is a man standing at the bottom of my bed and I am sweating. I get nightmares quite a lot and I dream I am in the big houses where I was in care and I hear the doors creaking. I can't watch a horror movie because it makes my nightmares ten times worse.
90. My lack of trust has affected my relationship with my partner and often it just feels like I can't trust him and there is no reason for me to feel like that. The same thing has happened to previous partners. I am just used to people lying to me, like saying I was only going to be somewhere for two weeks and then being forgotten about and leaving me there for months.
91. I split up with my partner, who is the father of our four children, probably because of our drinking and our constantly arguing and ever since then everything went downhill.
92. I was more over-protective of my children because I didn't want them to go into care like I did. I tried harder to be there for my children and I had debt because I tried to give them Christmases like I never had. Since I have become a grandmother I have been able to kiss and cuddle my grandchildren more than I was ever able to do with my own children.
93. I can't cuddle anyone or be affectionate and I just can't handle anyone coming too close to me and if they do I have panic attacks. I have had three relationship breakups with partners because what happened to me affected my intimacy with them.
94. The social work got involved with my family when one of my sons was nine. It was after my partner had left me and I was working really long hours because I had to. My partner was quite strict and dealt with the discipline and I was much softer than he was. When he left, my son had the police at the door and they in turn got the social work involved. I was still drinking alcohol but not quite as much and not so that it affected my parenting. My own children were never taken into care.

95. My daughter got into the wrong crowd when she was growing up and took drugs and I now have legal custody of both of her children, my grandchildren. I think how my daughter has turned out is probably a knock on effect of what happened to me in my childhood in care.
96. At the school where I have worked for about eleven years, I always look out for the children who aren't fitting in or who obviously have nothing. When I see them it makes me think about my life and I feel like they are me so I do my best to help them fit in.
97. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about my time in care. I would love to line all the staff up who were in the homes I was in and I would ask each one how they managed to get the job they were doing and ask them if they did it for the money because they certainly didn't do it for the love of the children.
98. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Treatment / Support

99. I have never sought any counselling or support for myself. I know I should have years ago but I didn't, basically because I didn't think anyone would believe me. If there was counselling or something like that available to me now I would probably give it a bash.

Records

100. I was keen to get my records relating to my time in care, partly because I wanted to know who decided and why I was sent to Cardross Park Assessment Centre twice. I have tried to get the records and I was told by the social work who were getting them for me that they had them in their office but I couldn't bring myself round to getting them. I am especially keen to get my records for Cardross because when we were in Craigellachie, one of the members of staff left the cabinet unlocked with our records so I took my files and went upstairs to read them.

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Learning Points

101. Staff looking for jobs at any of these children's homes or residential establishments must undergo an interview by top professionals, preferably a Quality Improvement Officer, and need to be vetted to the max and make sure they are doing it for the love of the children and not for the money. All these children's homes must have access to cooking facilities and good hygiene. It would be great if people with experience, like young girls who are currently training to be hairdressers or nutritionists, if they could come to the homes and speak to the children to show them how they can move on and survive when they leave. Don't just open the door when they are leaving care and say 'Bye' and throw them into the big bad world. I survived, but a lot of people who I know didn't. I was lucky.
102. There should be inspections within the residential homes on a regular basis and every child in the unit should be spoken to, to make sure their care needs are being met.

Hopes for the inquiry

103. I hope by me coming forward that nothing like what happened to me will happen again. Children in care are not necessarily bad children; they didn't choose to be in there.
104. I would like to see seminars or conferences take place where people who are responsible for the running of these places would get to hear what I have said so they will see it from our side and learn from the previous poor treatment of children.
105. 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.

GBL

Signed

Dated 21.02.17