

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

LLS

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is LLS. My name as a child in care was LLS. My date of birth is 1966. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Glasgow. A lot of what I know about my life before going into care I got from my godmother, [REDACTED], and from a Church of Scotland minister and his wife called [REDACTED]. My mum stayed with [REDACTED] on and off. [REDACTED] knew my mum before I was born and were involved with her up until her death. I occasionally stayed with them at the manse in Stirling when I was in care and they facilitated contact with my mum.
3. My mum was [REDACTED]. She died in [REDACTED] 2007. My mum had mental health problems and she was an alcoholic. She was in care herself. Apparently, she threw me into a swimming pool with my clothes on and very soon after that I was put into care. My mum was in and out of prison and mental institutions for most of my childhood. My mum was a very difficult person to like.
4. My father was [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] said he was a lovely man but couldn't cope with my mother's behaviours. He just disappeared. I don't know anything else about him. I have no brothers or sisters.

5. There was social work involvement with me from a very young age. The social workers I remember worked out of Drumchapel Social Work Department. Margaret Williams was my social worker from when I was about seven years old. She was my mum's social worker too. Margaret became friends with my mum and with [REDACTED].

Castlemilk Babies Home, Glasgow

6. As far as I'm aware, I went to Castlemilk Babies Home when I was six months old. I have no memory of the home.

Craig Dhu Children's Home, Glasgow

7. My earliest memories are in Craig Dhu Children's Home. I was there from when I was two years old until I was nearly seven years old. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Leaving Craig Dhu Children's Home

9. For whatever reason, social work decided I could go back and stay with my mum. I left Craig Dhu and went back to my mum when I was nearly seven years old.

Returning to stay with mum

10. Staying with my mum lasted for about seven or eight months. It was not working out well and I remember distinctly going over to Dunoon and staying there at a holiday home called Dunclutha.

Dunclutha Holiday Home, Dunoon

11. When I was seven years old, I was taken to Dunclutha while social work worked out what they were going to do with me. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Leaving Dunclutha Holiday Home

13. After about three weeks, the panel decided I was going to Cathkin House. It was a Friday and I went straight from the panel to Cathkin House. My social worker was a woman but I can't remember her name. She told me I was going to Cathkin House for the weekend, while they sorted out how to support my mum to look after me. However, that wasn't true and social work were my legal guardians.

Cathkin House, Rutherglen, Glasgow

14. I went to Cathkin House when I was seven years old in Secondary Institutions - to be published later 1973. I stayed there until I was fifteen years old in 1981. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Leaving Cathkin House

105. I left Cathkin House in 1981 when I was fifteen years old. Secondary Institutions - to be published later
Secondary Institutions - to be published later there was a children's review meeting in the
home. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later went straight into a children's review to be told I was leaving that day.

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Roberton Assessment Centre, Hyndland, Glasgow

109. You are meant to be at the centre to be assessed for three weeks. I was there for a few months. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Leaving Robertson Assessment Centre

115. It was decided I was going to Mathara House which was run by the Salvation Army. They thought a hostel was the best place for me, rather than another children's home.

Marthara House, Dennistoun, Glasgow

116. I was still fifteen years old when I went to Marthara House. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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I lasted about a month.

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Leaving Marthara House

118. My social worker drove me back to Marthara House and got my stuff. She tried to get me into Robertson but it was full, so she took me to Beechwood Assessment Centre. That was meant to be temporary.

Beechwood Assessment Centre, Glasgow

119. I stayed at Beechwood for a few months. I was still fifteen years old. The staff were brilliant at Beechwood and in the subsequent units I stayed in. They treated me like a human being and my views were considered. Decisions were being made about me but I was involved. I was asked how I felt about things that were happening.
120. I had been out of education for a long time. I went back to Stonelaw High School in Rutherglen.
121. My mum still came to visit me at Beechwood. The staff asked if I wanted to see her and, if I said no, they said I wasn't in. If my mum wanted to wait they said she couldn't and suggested she phone the next time before coming up.

122. At Beechwood, the staff knew I loved Indian food. If the night staff got a take away, occasionally they woke me up quietly and took me into the staff room to have a wee taste. It was the kind of thing you would do as a treat for your own kids.
123. I spent Christmas at Beechwood. Most of the people went home and there were only two of us left.
124. The staff spoke about the consequences of your actions in a way that had never been discussed before. I ran away from Beechwood Assessment Centre once. When I got back, they put me in my pyjamas and dressing gown and took my clothes away for two days. I knew that was the consequence of running away because I'd seen it happen to other people.

Leaving Beechwood Assessment Centre

125. Going to Stonelaw High in Rutherglen, I was travelling for three hours a day. I got the bus from Beechwood to Glasgow City Centre and then to Rutherglen. That was never going to work out.
126. There was a meeting at Beechwood and they said that the next move was to go to Langland's Park List D School in Port Glasgow. Legally, I had to be educated until I was sixteen years old and the only way to do that was to go to a residential school. I was involved in the decision and I agreed with them.

Langland's Park List D School, Port Glasgow

127. I was in four institutions in less than a year. I was still fifteen years old. I stayed at Langland's Park for a few months. The staff were brilliant in Langland's Park. You were asked if you wanted to help cook and you did. You did baking as part of school.

128. When I moved to Langland's Park, my mum ended up in a hostel in Greenock. My mum still visited and the staff at Langland's asked me if I wanted to see her. I could say I didn't want to and I wouldn't have to see her.
129. Going to Langland's Park was the best thing that ever happened to me. There was a teacher called Sian whose dad was the head of Langland's Park. She said to him that I was miles ahead of everyone else educationally and they would need to find something for me to do. They arranged for me to go to a short catering course at James Watt College in Greenock because they knew I was interested in catering. I got the train every day from Port Glasgow to Greenock. I loved it.
130. I quickly went from the main building to accommodation in a house in the grounds. Staff didn't stay in the house and you got to stay there because you could be trusted. The staff said I wasn't the bad person I had been made out to be and I just hadn't been given the opportunities I should have had.
131. I never had any bother in Langland's Park. Some of the people who were in there were nutters. I was always told I was damaged and challenging. When I went into Langland's Park there were people who actually were damaged and challenging, on a scale I had never seen.
132. I went to Ailsa Children's Home at weekends. The majority of children in the school lived with their parents and stayed at school Monday to Friday, going home at the weekends. The only people who stayed in Langland's Park at weekends were those who didn't deserve their weekend leave. I wasn't asked if I wanted to go to Ailsa but I was told I was going there.

Leaving Langland's Park List D School

133. When I was sixteen and had finished the catering course, I went to Ailsa Children's Home full time. They said I didn't need to be at Langland's Park. In the staff's opinion,

I shouldn't have been at Llangland's Park in the first place. I had started to believe in myself for the first time ever.

Ailsa Children's Home, Turnberry Road, Hyndland, Glasgow

134. Including when I went for weekends, I was at Ailsa Children's Home for about a year.

I lived there permanently for six or seven months. I was sixteen years old.

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I was put into West Princes

Hostel.

West Princes Street Hostel, Charing Cross, Glasgow

158. I ended up at the hostel late at night and didn't see another person. The next morning I got up and met the other girls. I stayed there for two weeks.

Leaving West Princes Street Hostel

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At Ailsa Children's Home, I was already half-way through a process where they teach children who have been in care how to live in a normal environment and manage their money. The only place to go was supported accommodation in Greenock.

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Supported Accommodation, Greenock

160. I moved to supported accommodation in the community quicker than I was meant to because I was in limbo. I stayed in a flat in [REDACTED] Greenock at first. Later, we moved from the flat to a house run by the same organisation.

Leaving Supported Accommodation

161. When I turned eighteen years old, I got a letter from the social work department telling me I was no longer their responsibility. I was effectively homeless.

Life after being in care

162. I went from supported accommodation to a homeless hostel in [REDACTED] Glasgow for a few months. Then I stayed with a girl from the hostel in Toryglen. She was having a baby so I left. I declared myself homeless again and went to a place in [REDACTED] in Springburn. Then I went into a Salvation Army Hostel called Hope House in [REDACTED]. I stayed there until I was nineteen and a half years old and got my own flat in Toryglen.
163. I got on well with the Salvation Army Majors who ran Hope House and, within a few months, they gave me a job. When I got my own flat, they offered me a permanent job and later I worked as one of the cooks. I worked there for four years. I met my husband, [REDACTED] when I was nineteen years old. [REDACTED] had lived all his life around the corner from Cathkin House. I gave up my flat in Toryglen and [REDACTED] and I moved into a flat together. We have two boys.
164. I took some time out of work when my eldest son was born. Then I did a catering course at college and got a job at Harry Ramsdens. I did another catering course and then a Higher National Certificate Catering Course. I was pregnant with our second son whilst I was doing a management course at college. I was quite unwell and gave the course up. After our second son was born, I worked in customer service part-time, I worked in retail and I've worked with [REDACTED] in distribution.
165. I got involved with my youngest son's football club as a volunteer. I managed the club database until I was ill and gave that up. The club later asked me back to do the role and said they'd pay me. I agreed to commit to a year and I'm still there. My role is compliance. I make sure all our officials are compliant in the role that they do.

Impact

166. Everybody says what happens to you in childhood defines the person that you are. In a lot of cases that is true. I wouldn't say my care experience consumes every part of my life but it's there and it is never going to go away. I'm not a person with a chip on my shoulder who blames their behaviour on having a bad time in care.
167. The children I grew up with were the innocent people in all of this but we were ill-treated throughout our childhood. Our childhoods have been stolen. We should have been allowed to be children instead of worrying all the time about what was going to happen to us. You couldn't be yourself.
168. The people around me say I am the way I am because I was brought up in care. I am a total control freak because control was something I didn't have growing up. I am a stubborn, determined individual. My friends say that is what has got me to where I am today. I'm acutely aware of ensuring that children are properly treated and heard.
169. My mum was a burden on my young shoulders and remained a burden right up until she died. I never spoke to her for the last four years. I couldn't be her mother. My mum and my mum's brothers were in care and it was important for me to break that cycle.
170. I knew from a young age that my children would never have the life I had. If I thought my children would be put into care I would never had had them. My children know I was in care and I didn't have a great time but they don't know the details. I don't want to burden them with it. Who wants to know their mum had a really shit time when she was growing up?
171. If people ask me where I was brought up, I say Cathkin House. That was my home.

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178. If I had been nurtured at school then I would have got more out of education. I could have left with O' Levels and Highers. I left with nothing and had to go back to college to be educated.
179. My husband knew I was brought up in care but I didn't speak about it for a long time. [REDACTED] lived in one family home from when he was three years old until he left home. [REDACTED] and I have moved a lot but the moves have been to move up from a flat to a house or to a better area. We've stayed in the same area for our children's schools and friends.
180. I had pneumonia and was in hospital for five days, seriously ill. I had a rare lung disease and was on steroids for three years. In 2017 I had an aggressive form of breast cancer. I had chemotherapy which affected my liver function. My heart rate dropped in response to medication. The doctors found I had a leaky heart valve which was either due to bronchitis or scarlet fever as a baby, or both. I'm healthy from one day to the next but I don't get more than five years without serious illness.

Experience as a Foster Carer

181. [REDACTED] and I started fostering when our youngest son was three years old and fostered children, short-term, for seven years until 2004. The main factor in us fostering was that I had been brought up in care and didn't have the greatest of experiences. [REDACTED] and I thought we had something to offer to these children.
182. A lot of the children are challenging but we didn't give up fostering because of the children, it was because of the bureaucracy. You were constantly banging your head

against a brick wall. Before a child comes into care, they are the number one priority. I found as soon as a child came into care then all of the focus went onto the parents. Social workers and the children's hearing system seemed to be reluctant to make a decision against parents, even when the intention all along was to have a child adopted.

183. The sole purpose of fostering is to look after the child until the parents prove they are capable of looking after them. In some instances, that does happen. My experience is that the kids are yo-yoing back and forth between the foster family and their natural parents. The damage that does to children is incredible.

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Records

192. When my eldest son was a baby, [REDACTED] told him stories about things he did when he was a little boy. I couldn't tell him these things because my memories from a young age were blurred so I applied for my records. I had to make a special application to the Director of Social Work because of the time I was in care. I think the Director at Strathclyde was Fred Edwards. I wasn't given my file. I wasn't allowed to have the file.

193. I had to go into Waterloo Street in Glasgow to see a counsellor to discuss my time in care. The counsellor wanted to work from age eighteen back. I thought that was pointless and that it should be about what I wanted to do. I wanted to know from birth to age seven because I know the rest of it. I knew a lot in my records would be staff member's perceptions and reports and might not be true. The counsellor wouldn't agree to that and I never went back. Sometimes I'd like to get access to my records and other times I don't. It's really upsetting to read how a person perceives you.
194. The police went to National Children's Homes in 2016. National Children's Homes said they had no record of me but they had records of [REDACTED] Months later they admitted they did have records of me. The police thought it was strange.

Lessons to be Learned

195. Staff have to be vetted and the process has to be improved. The prerequisite of being a Christian to work for National Children's Homes is not good enough. There's got to be more to caring for children than that. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
196. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
197. As much as possibly can be done, should be done, to make sure that carers are good people. Carers should go on training courses before they are allowed near children. Carers should never be left alone with children, for their safety as well as the child's safety. There will be situations where you have one to ones but by then, the carer should have had lots of training on how to manage that situation.

198. Carers shouldn't be thrown in at the deep end, as some students were when I was in care. I wonder if some of the students were damaged by dealing with us. A lot of children have challenging behaviour and they need to be dealt with by professionals who understand their needs. People need to understand that children are in care because their parents can't look after them, for whatever reason.
199. Children in care need to be consulted. They need to be asked where they want to live and what school they want to go to. Children should be asked how they feel, how they're enjoying life where they are staying and how they are getting on with the people they live with. If children are upset then they need to be asked why they are upset. You will get the best out of children if you give them choices and let them see they are valued.
200. Children in care shouldn't be abandoned when they are eighteen years old. You wouldn't do that to your own child. Some people are made homeless and that should never be allowed to happen. Lots of people I grew up in care with are in prison, have mental health problems or are drug addicts or alcoholics. They were abandoned and never taught to how to live in a normal household.
201. Statistics show that children who have been in care are the worst educated. Children who are in the care system should have access to the best education there is. I don't mean private education. If there is an option for the child to go to a school six miles away that offers them something that the school round the corner doesn't, then they should get that opportunity. Children should be treated as individuals.
202. Parents should be given a set amount of time to show they are making a concerted effort to get their child back. If parents can't show that, then they should be told that social work will look at adoption. Children can't be yo-yoing back and forth. What is in the best interests of the child should be the first question that is asked about every child coming into care.

Other information

203. You can't change the past but you can use my experiences, and the experiences of everybody like me, to improve what happens in the future, so that children in care have a positive experience.
204. 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.

Signed.....LLS.....

Dated.....25 March 2021.....