

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MSO [REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is MSO [REDACTED]. My name at birth was MSO [REDACTED] and I was known as MSO [REDACTED] while I was in care. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1972. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Muirhouse in Edinburgh. My father, [REDACTED], was in the army. My mother was [REDACTED]. They were married for thirteen years. I had a half-brother, [REDACTED], who was adopted. We found each other in 2010. I had a brother [REDACTED], who I don't speak to. He is a paedophile. I have another brother [REDACTED] and two sisters, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
3. I travelled the world with my parents, when my dad was in the army. I saw the world in a way that most kids don't. I stayed in Germany, Northern Ireland, Singapore, Cyprus, and Hong Kong. When my dad left the army, I realised that my mother was an alcoholic. She couldn't care for me, she was an unfit mother.
4. My parents divorced after my dad left the army, when I was thirteen. I stayed with my mum for a year after that. She was drinking and I was going off the rails. I was skiving off school, hanging about at the skate park.
5. I was in care by the time I was thirteen or fourteen. I remember I went to children's hearings in Livingston, but then my mum moved to Edinburgh. She moved to [REDACTED] and then it was either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] that I stayed at before I went into care. At that time, my brother [REDACTED] started sexually abusing children and got

locked in Polmont Young Offenders' Institution. I think there was a social worker involved before I went into care. I saw a social worker in [REDACTED] and in [REDACTED]. At that time, my social worker was called Linda.

Calder Grove Children's Home, Edinburgh, 1985

6. I went to Calder Grove Children's Home for about six to eight weeks. Secondary Institu

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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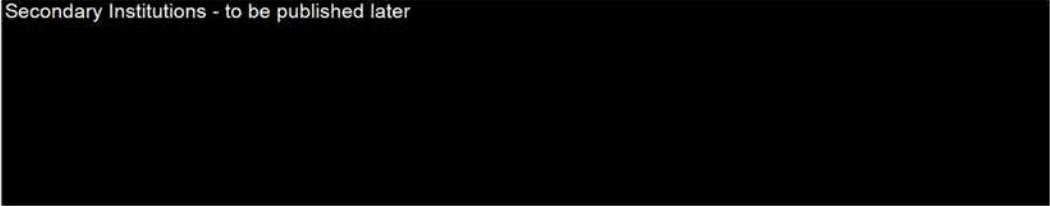
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Leaving Calder Grove Children's Home

17. After my initial assessment at Calder Grove, it was decided to place me in Northfield Young Peoples' Centre.

Northfield Young Peoples Centre, Northfield Drive, Edinburgh 1985 to 1987

18. Secondary Institutions - to be published later
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19. I went to Northfield when I was between twelve and fourteen. I was only there a matter of months.

20. Secondary Institutions - to be published later
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Leaving Northfield

46. Secondary Institutions - to be published later
47. Secondary There was a meeting between my mum, the social workers, and the staff at Northfield. They decided what was to happen to me. I got told by my mum that I would be leaving Northfield the next week, Secondary Institutions - to be published later
- I went back to my mum's after school one day, and she told me to pack a bag. She told me I was leaving, that I was going to Balnacraig.

Balnacraig School, Perth 1987 to 1988

48. I hadn't heard anything about Balnacraig before I went there. I just knew it was in Perthshire.

Routine at Balnacraig School

First day

49. My social worker, Linda, drove me and my mum up to Balnacraig when I first went there. I remember going up the drive, up a hill to this massive building. From outside the building was very impressive. It was an old Victorian building, with big grounds. It was a two-storey building, but it was a weird layout. There were neighbours next door, but it was a big estate so they were quite far away.
50. I was met by Mr SGQ SNR and another member of staff. I think his name was Mr GHG They showed me where I would be sleeping, where the dining room was, and where the classrooms were. My mum had dinner with me, and then she left.

51. There were about forty girls in total at Balnacraig. The age range was from twelve to fifteen. I can remember a girl called [REDACTED] from Aberdeen, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] from Edinburgh, and another girl from Pitlochry. It was all females at Balnacraig.
52. Downstairs, on the left hand side of the front door was the pool table and the phone. The dining room was always laid out perfectly. On the right hand side was Mr SGQ [REDACTED] room and the room of [REDACTED] secretary. There was a room for SNR [REDACTED] SNR [REDACTED] Mr GHG [REDACTED]. We called him GHG [REDACTED]. There was a kitchen, a utility room, a recreation room, and a medical room. Then there was "The Torture Room".
53. I wasn't told how long I was going to be at Balnacraig. They said it wouldn't be long, just until a place became available in Edinburgh, but I was there for about two years.

Mornings and bedtime

54. Upstairs, on the left hand side there were shared bedrooms. They had five bedrooms with four or five beds in each one. On the right hand side were individual rooms, for the well-behaved girls.
55. I shared a room with three other girls. We each had a wardrobe for our personal possessions, but if I got anything new, I would take it home to my mum's because things went missing at Balnacraig.
56. The staff didn't wake us up in the morning and we weren't allowed alarm clocks. We just got up when it got light.

Mealtimes/Food

57. Everything was run by a member of staff striking a gong, telling you when to go down for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, when to go to school, everything. There were about six or seven tables in the dining room, maybe more.

58. In the morning, after we got dressed, we went down to the dining room for breakfast. Each table in turn, would go up to get breakfast. There were cereals, yoghurt, fruit, and toast. It was OK, you could choose what you wanted. If you didn't like the food, you didn't have to eat it, but the staff preferred it if you did.

Washing/bathing

59. The bathrooms were upstairs. There were separate showers and bathrooms. We could have a shower in the morning. I didn't shower much, as there were no doors on the front of the showers for privacy. They had curtains on the front, so the staff could open them up as they walked by, even the male members of staff. It was the same with the toilets.
60. Because of that, I wasn't very clean when I was at Balnacraig. They didn't make us shower. I would just get dressed under my duvet.

Clothing/uniform

61. We had two uniforms. We had a blue uniform one week, and a grey uniform the next week, then back to blue.
62. We weren't allowed to wear skirts with buttons, it had to be an elasticated waist. We weren't allowed to wear trousers either. I had normally worn trousers to school, before Balnacraig.

School

63. We had our schooling in Balnacraig. If we did ever go out, we were escorted by the staff. The front door was always locked.
64. We were all schooled together, regardless of age. There were girls from twelve to sixteen, all being taught the same things together. There were different teachers for

different subjects. The teachers came in from outside Balnacraig, they weren't members of staff. We didn't get any homework.

65. I didn't get to do any exams at Balnacraig. I had to do my exams at college, after I had left school.
66. I did start doing an art course at Balnacraig. I was allowed into the grounds, but I wasn't allowed out of the grounds of the school. I would just sit and draw, to escape from the school. They could see me, but no one bothered me. No one came over to encourage me either.

Chores

67. You would only have to do chores if you had misbehaved. You would have to do dishes, setting the table, and things like that. If you behaved and came back on time from home leave, you didn't have to do chores.
68. In the evenings, they organised things for us. We helped out in old people's homes. There were about four or five, one each night, except for Thursday night.

Religious instruction

69. I think they preferred it if we didn't go to church, because it would mean more staff having to work at weekends. There wasn't any other form of religious instruction.

Leisure time

70. The recreation room was the main area downstairs. It was where we had meetings and where we hung out in the evenings. It was just a big room, with a semi-circle of chairs. We would just sit and talk.

71. On Thursday night, we had horse riding in Dundee, unless you had it withdrawn as a punishment.

Birthdays and Christmas

72. Balnacraig was closed at Christmas, Easter, and in the school summer holidays. They did have a Christmas tree, I helped decorate it but it would be down again by the time you came back after the Christmas holidays. I never got any Christmas presents at Balnacraig.
73. I was at Balnacraig for my fifteenth and sixteenth birthdays. I did get a birthday cake, which the cooks would make for you. They were brilliant. You could go in to the kitchen and help them to prepare meals. The cooks were like your granny. They would buy you wee presents, wee trinkets. One of the cooks was called Iris, but we called them Granny 1 and Granny 2.

Visits/Review of Detention

74. I was still back and forward to Children's Panel hearings at Balnacraig. There was an order saying I had to stay there from Monday to Friday and to go back to my mum's at weekends. I should have got home leave every weekend, it should have been each Friday to Sunday but I didn't get to go every weekend.
75. If my mum or the social worker did come up, they were treated like kings and queens because the staff were getting paid from the social work department. My mum only came to see me once at Balnacraig.
76. There was always a member of staff with you when you saw the social worker, however I did manage to tell my social worker about the abuse. She said not to be stupid, that it was all in my head.

Healthcare

77. I was still going to my own GP in Edinburgh when I was at Balnacraig. I don't know if there were other arrangements for the other kids. I also saw a dentist when I went back home to my mum's. I did have to go to Perth Royal Infirmary a couple of times, like when my wrist got broken.
78. I went on the contraceptive pill when I was sixteen. I told my mum, and she was OK about it. The next thing I knew, there was a big meeting at Balnacraig about me being on the pill. They found out I was on the pill, because they searched my person and my bag when I came back from weekend leave on Sunday nights. They took my prescription off me. They went on the phone to my mum about it, there was no confidentiality.
79. They wanted control, and to control the administration of drugs. There were no medically qualified staff to do this, it could be any member of staff who would administer drugs to you.

Running away

80. I was known as a runner. Any chance I got, I would go back to Edinburgh. I would hitchhike from Perth to Edinburgh.
81. On the weekends I did get to go home, I would run away. My mum would be out working until five o'clock in the morning, and then she would be constantly drunk. I could break into her house, through my bedroom window, without her knowing about it. I would go out with friends to Leith Walk, Princes Street, or to Portobello. I could stay with friends and then go back to my mum's. The police would come looking for me when I didn't go back to Balnacraig.
82. When I was found by the police, if it was late at night, I would get taken to a twelve-hour children's unit and then meet up with Tayside police the next day.

Bed Wetting

83. I didn't suffer from bed wetting but it happened on a regular basis. There was one girl, I think she was called [REDACTED], she was a bed wetter. The staff ridiculed her, although they ridiculed all of us. We would know when she had done it because the staff would say that she had pished the bed. She was a girl with special needs, she shouldn't have been in there. She needed extra support that wasn't there.
84. We would try to protect her. We would change her bed and let her run to the kitchen staff to get a wash. She got put in "The Torture Room". I think it was for bed wetting.

Abuse at Balnacraig School

85. Balnacraig was the worst two years of my life. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
[REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
86. Mr [REDACTED] SGQ, [REDACTED] SNR, was sly. He would hit us and tell us we were no good.
87. Mr [REDACTED] SGQ would call you in to his office for a chat. When you went to Mr [REDACTED] SGQ office, you weren't alone, there would be four or five girls at a time. We would all have to sit on his knee or on his lap. He would have his hands down our skirts or inside our blouses. He would put his hand down the back of your skirt. I think that's why the skirts were elasticated, to make it easier for him to do that. We were not allowed to wear tight fitting tops, they had to be loose blouses, which again I think was deliberate, to let him feel us up. He would touch your breasts, under your bra.
88. He would make horrible comments like, "You're on your period, why do you want to go home and bleed?" "You're a Devil's child, you're on your period, you're not getting to go home." and saying things like, "Bitch, stand up."
89. We had meetings on a Wednesday to decide if pupils were going home at the weekend, and sometimes he would just refuse to let you go.

90. When I was sixteen, I was allowed to get calls from my boyfriend. Mr SGQ would listen in to the calls. I don't like eggs, and one weekend I got eggs for all of my meals. I told my mum about this in a phone call. Mr SGQ, or another member of staff had listened in on my call. Mr SGQ slapped me across the face and told me not to say that. Another member of staff put a wet towel on my face to ease the pain.
91. At night time, where my bed was, I was facing a window. I didn't usually get undressed until the last minute. I didn't want to go around in my underwear because there were a lot of male members of staff. We all wore short nightdresses to bed. When the staff came in to the room at night, I would just freeze and shut my eyes because I knew I was going to be abused.
92. There were male and female members of staff who would put their hands inside your underwear. They would spread your legs and insert their fingers inside you. I can't be sure who was doing it because I always froze with my eyes closed.
93. The other girls and I talked about the abuse but it's difficult to remember all the details. I do have some other recollections of abuse at Balnacraig, but I am still trying to process it all. I have had bad dreams about it. I'm trying to separate what happened to me, and what happened to other girls.
94. It has been difficult for me to deal with, because one of my abusers lived in the same village as me. It is a tiny place with only four shops. I can't remember his full name, it was something GYX or GYX something. He died in of 2018, around about .
95. He was one of the weekend staff. He would come in to the dormitory, fondle you, and hit you. He used to punch you in the kidneys or on the upper arm, because the sleeve of your uniform would cover any bruises. He would say things like, "You're stupid, you're not worth anything." Or, "Your family didn't want you, that's why you are here." I heard him verbally abusing other girls with the same comments. This was something that I remember being discussed amongst the girls.

96. I got put in the room we called "The Torture Room". This was where you were put as a punishment for misbehaving. The staff did have an official name for it, but I can't remember what that was. It wasn't quite a broom cupboard but there was no window in The Torture Room. You would be locked in there all day, with a staff member. You didn't get to interact with any of the other children. At mealtimes, you would have your food brought through to you.
97. The staff member would hit you, they would hit you with a ruler, or stab you with pens and pencils. I have scars on my legs from being stabbed with a pencil. They would slap you about the head, because that wouldn't cause a bruise.
98. A member of staff broke my wrist in The Torture Room. I can't remember his name. I got taken to Perth Royal Infirmary to have it set in plaster. I had been told to say that I had fallen down the stairs. That's what I told the hospital staff, because I wanted to get home the next weekend.
99. I was taken to Perth Royal Infirmary by another member of the staff, a woman who ran a B&B. She just worked at Balnacraig at weekends. She was a lovely lady, she used to let us kids go down to her B&B at weekends. I can't remember her name. She had been told that I had fallen down the stairs. I think she could see what had happened but she couldn't prove anything. She asked me if I had really fallen down the stairs, and I said yes.
100. After that incident, I never saw the member of staff who broke my wrist again, but I know he was still working at the school. I think there had been a few incidents with him.

Reporting of abuse at Balnacraig School

101. I told the police loads of times about the abuse I was suffering at Balnacraig, if they were nice police officers. I remember one who said, "It happens a lot in these institutions." It was as if there was nothing they could or would do about it.

102. I told my social worker about the abuse I was suffering on more than one occasion. I can remember one meeting with her, and the member of Balnacraig staff went out of the room. I told her I was being hit. She didn't believe me, she downplayed it. I ended up refusing to see my social worker because she wasn't helping me.
103. My mum was just the same as the social worker, she didn't believe that the staff would do that. It was as if it was all in my head.
104. When my wrist was broken, I didn't tell my mum or the social worker. They thought the injuries I would have were from fighting with another child. Sometimes I was fighting with other children, but that would not be what caused the injuries they could see.

Leaving Balnacraig

105. The minute I turned sixteen, things changed. I would say, "I'm an adult now, I can decide things for myself." I told the staff I was getting married. I had been in a relationship since I was twelve years old. As we grew, my boyfriend ended up joining the army, and he was in Berlin. He had not been in Balnacraig, we met in Edinburgh. We saw each other when he was back on leave.

Life after being in care

106. I had turned sixteen, so I was leaving the care system. I had to have a Children's Panel where they said that I would be able to leave when the school term ended. If I had been able to get a college place, I would have been allowed to leave earlier but they wouldn't let me apply for college. I think they wanted me to stay as long possible, so they could get more money.
107. After I left care, there was no support, no social worker. I last saw my social worker at my final children's panel hearing. I think that was on [REDACTED] 1988, the day after my sixteenth birthday. I left my mum's house the following January. I had started taking drugs and drinking in Balnacraig. I couldn't cope with my mum being an alcoholic.

108. I got married too young, at sixteen. I had five children, two of whom stay with their dad. I separated from my husband in 1996, when I was pregnant with my son, [REDACTED]
109. My ex-husband was in the army, and I joined too. I was in the army for three years, attached to my husband's regiment. I found out my husband was having an affair with my best friend, so I told him to leave. It was an abusive relationship, as was the next relationship I was in. I am not bothered about seeking out another relationship. I don't seem to learn from my past mistakes, so I am just better off on my own.
110. Three of my kids ended up in care, when I had a breakdown after my mum died. My mum suffered from Motor Neuron Disease. I ended up as her sole carer, caring for her and three of my children. I had a breakdown and my kids were put in care. All three of my children who were put in care, two sons and my daughter, were abused whilst in care. I only found out about my daughter suffering abuse, last month. She is going to be making her own statement to the Inquiry.

Employment history

111. I have done loads of jobs, but I find it difficult to hold down a job. I don't like being cooped up in an office from nine to five, I'd rather be outside. I do seasonal work for a security company at music festivals every year, throughout the UK and Ireland. I like the feeling of freedom it gives me, it's the same when I'm at home, I always have the windows open in the house.

Impact

112. I had a brilliant childhood, until I went into care. I don't see much of my family, I have shut them out over the last thirty years. They didn't believe me about the abuse that I suffered, so what's the point in speaking to them?

113. I told cousins and aunts about what was happening to me in care. I tried to ask them for help but they did nothing. I think I wanted to break ties, so I didn't get hurt again but it's time they knew.
114. I have told my older brother about the abuse I went through, and he believes me. He has encouraged me to tell others.
115. I fell out with my dad two years ago but I have now sorted that out. I propose to tell my dad about what happened, soon.
116. My mental health has suffered as a result of my time in care. I suffer from anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. I am going to see a psychologist in March. I have only searched for help recently.
117. Two doctors have told me on two occasions that I should be in hospital, but I have managed to sort myself out in the house. I would rather have a hospital bed free for someone who needs it.
118. I suffer from chronic migraines. **Secondary Institutions - to be published later**
Secondary Institutions - I have had ambulances sent out for me, I have had hospital admissions over the headaches. They thought last year that I had a brain tumour. I was on thirty tablets a day, but then I got acupuncture piercings and now I am down to four tablets a day. I am still on anti-depressants. I have been for the last two years, and I was on and off them for years before that. I am getting my medication changed again. My new doctor is very understanding.
119. I think about my time in care a lot just now, because of coming to give a statement, and because I talk to my children in the house about the mental and physical abuse.
120. I did go back to the outside of Balnacraig previously, as my brother lives in Perth, but I couldn't step over the threshold of the gateway. I am scared to go back inside in case it brings back other memories. I do want to go back, to get closure but I am taking it one step at a time. I will get there.

Reporting of Abuse

121. I told various people about the abuse I suffered in care. I told my social worker Linda, my mother, and my aunt [REDACTED]. My social worker didn't believe me, and because of that, my mother didn't believe me either.
122. I told the police about the abuse I suffered when I was in care, when they would detain me when I ran away, but I have not made a formal statement to the police as an adult.
123. When my daughter [REDACTED] was in care, the social workers wanted to transfer her from a placement in Dumfries to a placement at Balnacraig. At her children's panel, when they asked if I had any objection, I told her social worker Wendy Walker and her family liaison officer Mary Morris as well as the other people at the meeting, that I had been abused at Balnacraig. They transferred her to another placement.

Records

124. I did try to get my records years ago, when I lived in Livingston, but it got blocked. I am going to make a further application.

Lessons to be learned

125. Kids who are in care should be listened to. I know that kids can and do lie, but they might be telling the truth. If kids do act up or misbehave, it might be because of their treatment in care.
126. If people had listened to me, they could have tried moving me to another place, rather than leaving me to be abused with the result that I have felt the way I feel for the last thirty years.

Other information

127. 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..  ..

Dated.. 14.03.19 ..