

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GVT

Support person present: Yes

1. My name GVT or GVT My date of birth is the 1946, I am 72 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. The person I want to tell you about is my son GVU born 1972. GVU passed away in 2001.
2. GVU was in care at the following two establishments. Brimmond Assessment Centre Bucksburn, Aberdeen for 20 weeks in 1985 and Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen between 1985 and 1988.
3. I have kept a journal of GVU life until his untimely death in 2001 and it is this I am using along with what GVU told me to provide an insight on his time in care and the devastating impact it had on his personal and family life.

### Life before going into care

4. GVU was born in Aberdeen and was the only son of my husband and me. My husband was called and he worked off shore on the oil rigs. My husband passed away on the 2011.
5. I had a difficult birth with GVU He was overdue and he suffered from foetal distress and had to be born quickly. He was a normal child and attended nursery when he was four. There were signs of hyper activity and he was always "on the go" as a

child. The only behavioural problems that were highlighted at that time was that he had a poor concentration span. He was a very normal child.

6. He went through Junior School and everything appeared to be fine. I was never called into the school about any behaviour problems and GUVU was just a normal child. He went on to senior school at Powis School in Aberdeen.
7. When he became thirteen I started to notice changes in his behaviour which I would describe as risky. He started playing truant and was mixing with the wrong crowd. As a parent this was pointed out to me and I tried to redress these issues by keeping a stricter control on him.
8. In the early eighties there was an incident between a local school called Linksfield School and Powis School where GUVU attended. The boys from both schools got involved in fighting with each other. On one occasion there were over a hundred boys fighting and petrol bombs had been thrown. It was a serious incident and my husband and I were asked to come into the school to be interviewed by the police.
9. I was spoken to by the police and the staff from the school. I don't recall any other parents being invited to the school to see the police. There was also a social worker called Thelma who was present. It was obvious that the police and school staff thought that GUVU behaviour was a concern.
10. Looking back at this incident I appreciate that it was serious but I didn't think that things had got out of hand. It wasn't something that we as parents could sort out with GUVU. The social worker Thelma told me that this matter would be going in front of a children's panel. I had no idea what this was and so Thelma explained how it worked and how we would be seen by volunteer members of the public who sat on the children's panel.
11. I duly went to the meeting with the children's panel and found the whole thing to be very intimidating. My husband and I were being judged on our parenting. GUVU was very much in the background. It was really the start of his behavioural problems. One

of the panel looked GUVU up and down and said that GUVU was a smart child. I don't think that they thought we were the type of family that usually appeared before the panel.

12. After they heard the circumstances they retired from the room to consider the next course of action. They came back and said that they wanted GUVU to be seen by a psychologist. As a result GUVU went to see a child psychologist called Kareen Edwards who practised in Aberdeen.
13. I think that he had four or five sessions with Kareen. I always went with GUVU but Kareen sometimes saw GUVU on his own. Kareen then submitted a report that said that GUVU was above average intelligence and that there were signs that he was slightly hyper-active.
14. I went back to the children's panel with GUVU aware of what the psychologists report had said. One of the members of the panel asked me why I was burying my head in the sand and ignoring GUVU behaviour. I was very angry about this comment and told the lady I did not agree with her. I was however very much in favour of GUVU getting some help if he needed it. The people on the panel were "talking down" to me which I found very upsetting. I felt that my husband and I were on trial.
15. I told the panel that I wasn't happy with their questions and I told them that I was unhappy. They were making assumptions on my life having met them once before and not knowing anything about my family life. The panel again retired from the room and when they came back they told me that they had decided that GUVU was to go into care.
16. GUVU had not been charged by the police. I asked GUVU what his role was in the fight and he just said he went along with everyone else. There was no indication that he was a ring leader or a danger to himself or the public. I was astounded. They said that he would go to Brimmond Assessment Centre where his behavioural issues would be monitored. I was shocked and asked how they could send him to a place



where he didn't know anyone from a house where he was loved by his family. How was that going to help him?

17. They told me that the staff at Brimmond were trained to deal with children who had behavioural problems and they would be able to help GUV. I couldn't understand how this was happening I had no control over what they were doing to GUV.
18. We came back home from the children's panel and we were given a date in a weeks' time when I was to take GUV into Brimmond Assessment Centre. GUV understood what was happening but he didn't show his feelings and he didn't speak about what was happening. I didn't want this to happen. I got the impression that the authorities felt that GUV couldn't go into normal education.
19. GUV was now thirteen and it was 1985. My husband and I took him to Brimmond Assessment Centre. I have never had such a feeling of abandonment. I don't know how GUV was feeling. We were never given a time limit for his stay at Brimmond.

#### **Brimmond Assessment Centre, Bucksburn, Aberdeen 1985**

##### *First day*

20. I remember the first day I went into Brimmond. When I entered the place for the first time there was a tension. There were doors banging and children screaming. It was a horrible atmosphere and I felt awful because I was going to have to leave GUV there. All the rooms were locked. It felt more like a prison and he was going to be punished instead of helped with his behavioural problems.
21. I have no idea of the names of the people at Brimmond. I do recall that we were met by a man who took us up to GUV room. GUV had a suitcase of clothes and a television for his room. My husband and I were there for most of the morning and left before lunch. I hated the thought of leaving GUV there.

22. The building itself was on two storeys set in large grounds. It was quite a long building. G V U had his own room and his window looked out on the airport. I remember my husband saying that when he was returning from the oil rigs G V U could look out and see his plane landing.
23. I think that there must have been about a hundred children at Brimmond of mixed sexes. I think that most of the boys were aged thirteen or fourteen.
24. This was the start of all of G V U problems. He was to spend most of his time absconding. I have no idea how he got away from the place as easily as he did.

#### **Routine at Brimmond Assessment Centre, Bucksburn, Aberdeen.**

25. I do not know much about the daily routine at Brimmond as G V U wouldn't tell me anything about it. I am not aware of any treatments that G V U received for his behavioural issues.

#### *Staff*

26. I do not think that any of the staff at Brimmond had any of the experience in dealing with children in the way that we were led to believe by the children's panel. They were more like prison officers. G V U was being punished and not helped. I never got to know any of the staff despite the fact that I visited most days.
27. I think that the only time I was contacted by the staff at Brimmond was to tell me that G V U had been caught glue sniffing. It was actually Thelma the social worker that contacted me.

#### *School*

28. I cannot remember where G V U went to school. I am not sure if there was a school attached to Brimmond.

### *Visits / Inspections/ Review of Detention*

29. I went to visit GUV every evening after work. Sometimes he wasn't there because he had absconded. I was never told when he did run away but turned up to visit anyway. You could just turn up. The visit was spent in GUV room. I don't think that there was a review of GUV placement in all the time he was there. If GUV saw his social worker he didn't tell me.

### *Running away*

30. Very early on in his stay at Brimmond GUV ran away. On the first occasion he ran away he had only been at Brimmond for a week. He was gone over night. This was a thirteen year old who had never been out after ten at night. I was not contacted by Brimmond to let me know but I do recall the Police coming to the house and they informed me. All the times that GUV ran away he never came back to his own house.
31. When GUV ran away he used to go to his friend [REDACTED] His mother who was called [REDACTED] used to make GUV hot chocolate and sit and speak to him. She always told GUV that he would need to go back and that she would have to tell me as his mother where he was there.
32. When I questioned GUV about running away all he ever said was that he couldn't stay at Brimmond. He never told me what was going on despite the fact I asked him lots of questions. I just knew that he was very unhappy to be at Brimmond.

### **Abuse at Brimmond Assessment Centre.**

33. My husband and I went to visit one of the days. All of the staff who were male and female and the children were on the grass outside. Two of the boys were fighting and they were knocking the living daylight out of each other while being encouraged by the staff. My husband and I went to a staff member to complain and get them to



stop the fight as we didn't think this was right. They were bare fist fighting it was ridiculous and the staff encouraged it.

### **Allegation of Sexual Abuse at Brimmond.**

34. G V U had been at Brimmond for eight or nine weeks when the allegations of sexual abuse appeared in the press. I think that there was an inquiry and the allegations were found to be proven. It led to Brimmond being closed down. I wasn't surprised because I could sense the physical and mental abuse that was going on. I could detect it in G V U behaviour that things were not right. He was the kind of child that kept things to himself and didn't discuss anything with me. I don't know if he was sexually abused although G V U strongly denied it.
35. G V U Social Worker Thelma got in touch and said that G V U would be coming home. She said that he was being removed from Brimmond and that his stay at home would only be until they found another placement for him.

### **Leaving Brimmond Assessment Centre, Bucksburn, Aberdeen.**

36. Because of the allegations of abuse at Brimmond and the inquiry into the allegations my understanding was that Brimmond was closed and all the residents were found alternative placements.
37. I don't think that G V U received any help with his behavioural problems when he was at Brimmond. I can't remember how schooling took place or whether there was a school attached to Brimmond. He may have gone to a local school but I just can't remember. I think that G V U was at Brimmond for about twenty weeks in total.
38. I realised that after he left Brimmond he was traumatised with what had happened there. He was displaying signs of anger and frustration. He was not attending school and my parents were helping to look after him. There was an incident when G V U got angry with my parents and he barricaded himself in his room.

39. [GVU] couldn't cope with the two weeks he was at home knowing that he was going to be placed in another children's home. [GVU] was also seeking out the company of other children he knew from school who had their own problems and I would describe as undesirable company. On several occasions I had to go and find [GVU] and bring him home. I think that [GVU] thought he had been treated like a criminal when he was in Brimmond and this was the reaction. He was smoking cannabis and also sniffing glue.

#### **Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen 1985 – 1988**

40. It was decided by the authorities that [GVU] would be sent to Oakbank Residential School in Aberdeen. I think that this was another Local Authority run school for boys and girls with behavioural problems. I think it might have been a List D school. It was well known in Aberdeen as the place where the bad boys went. No one asked me how I felt. I was not part of the decision making process. [GVU] didn't want to go there. My husband and I didn't want him to go as we wanted him at home.
41. All I got was a letter from Thelma, [GVU] Social Worker, which gave us instructions on where to take [GVU] and the time and date that he was expected. There were no other instructions.
42. Oakbank was another very large building set in its own grounds. It was for boys and girls. I think that the doors were locked but I can't be sure of that.

#### *First day*

43. My husband and I took [GVU] to Oakbank. I was met by [HMY] who [SNR] [SNR]. He informed us that [GVU] would be there until he was sixteen. I got a complete shock. No one had prepared us for that I thought he was only there for a short period of time to help with his behavioural problems.
44. I think that the person who had [REDACTED] the children was a man called [LIL] [REDACTED]. It was strange because I didn't have the same feeling as I had when I



went into Brimmond. There was not the same feeling of tension. I think that my husband and I were in a room with [GVU] when a big tall man with a moustache came and took [GVU] to his dormitory he was to share with other boys. The staff were friendly enough but I had a bad feeling about that man.

45. On the first day the staff went through the housekeeping rules. They also told me about visiting hours. I don't recall being told what the schooling arrangements were but I think that the classrooms were all on the Oakbank site.

### **Routine at Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen 1985 -1988**

#### *Staff*

46. I again wondered what qualifications the staff at Oakbank had. They also had the feeling of being guards as opposed to people who were going to help [GVU] with his behavioural problems. I only really remember Mr [HMY] who was [SNR] [LIL] [LIL] who [ ] the children and had most to do with [GVU]. There was also a man who had the surname Mitchell and another man who was very tall with a moustache.
47. I do remember that the man called [LIL] was reprimanded for something that happened at the school and that he was suspended. I have no idea what he did it is just something that sticks in my mind.

#### *Clothing*

48. I remember that [GVU] could wear his own clothing but it all to be labelled with his name.

#### *Visiting*

49. There were strict visiting hours in the afternoon and evenings. I went every evening to visit [GVU]. You would meet him in a big room and sit at a table. I was not allowed

to take GUVU out anywhere. There was no privacy during the meetings as you were all in one big room. I was told by LIL that I was not doing GUVU any favours by coming to visit him every day. I basically told him that I would not be changing my routine and that I would continue to visit every day and every weekend.

#### *Holidays and home leave*

50. The whole time that GUVU was at Oakbank he never had a holiday at home or was allowed to come home at weekends. It was because he was always absconding and was being punished.

#### *School*

51. I cannot be certain but I think that all the schooling was done at Oakbank and that the classrooms were contained within the building.

#### *Running away*

52. Things didn't pan out very well and GUVU was running away at every opportunity. GUVU was friendly with another boy called [REDACTED] and they would run away together. The police were always contacted and they would get in touch with me to let me know. As far as I remember Oakbank never contacted me to tell me he had run away. GUVU never came to his own house when he ran away.

#### *My recollections of GUVU stay at Oakbank*

53. GUVU changed completely. He was now an angry boy fighting authority at every opportunity. There was one particular evening when I went to visit GUVU with my sister. GUVU came into the visiting area in his pyjamas with his ankles tied together with rope. He shuffled across to meet us it was like a scene from an American prison. I was shocked I couldn't understand why they were doing this.

54. I was told by the staff that this was the routine when the children ran away. I was very angry and my sister and I made a complaint to Mr LIL. He told us that this was what happened when the children ran away. Mr LIL was very arrogant and he just said that this was the punishment for running away.
55. I think that the children were restrained very robustly when they were there. GUV never told me anything. I noticed bruises all over GUV body including his back. He never told me what was going on but I knew he was being physically abused by the staff. I was also told by other boys who I met in later life that the routine was very harsh and the physical abuse from the staff happened all the time.
56. GUV was to be at Oakbank from age thirteen to age sixteen. When he left I never got my son back he was so badly damaged. He was not the same person that had gone into Oakbank. I just felt that you wouldn't treat an animal like that.
57. There was no break in the way they treated GUV at Oakbank. There was no plan in place to change his behaviours. He was being constantly punished for running away. GUV refused to discuss what happened to him. He denied strongly that he had ever been sexually abused.
58. There was one occasion when GUV had to go to the accident and emergency department of the local hospital after he had been in an incident at Oakbank. He needed stitches in a wound to his face. He never told me what had happened and when I asked the staff about it they just said it was boys being boys.
59. One of the problems with GUV is that he thought he was tough enough to deal with everything by himself. He didn't want to bring his problems to me as if he was protecting me. He never told me about the bad things that happened to him. He just said that he could deal with them.
60. I think that GUV had a terrible feeling of abandonment. I personally had a terrible feeling of guilt that I had allowed this to happen. It should never have happened. It was completely over the top.



### **Leaving Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen 1988.**

61. G V U came out of Oakbank when he was sixteen. He was mentally scarred. He had very low self-esteem and his behaviour became very risky. He started stealing and was glue sniffing. He had various scrapes with the Police. He was just a lost boy. The regime had destroyed him. He was not the only one. I reiterate that the kids in Oakbank were not there to be helped they were there to be punished.
62. I recall the day he came out. It was just before Christmas and we managed to have our first Christmas together since he was fourteen. Both sets of grandparents were at the house and we had a party with cake.
63. I was unaware of any occasions when he was in Oakbank that he received counselling. There were no trained Counsellors there. The only time I heard from Thelma was when G V U was in trouble for his behaviour. Sometimes she would phone and on occasion she called at the house. She never discussed any treatment that he was receiving. I think that G V U was institutionalised. He was charged by the police on many occasions.
64. I had fourteen years of G V U problems. He became a heroin addict and spent time in Polmont Young Offenders. I was very worried in the early days when G V U came out of Oakbank. I asked for a meeting with the authorities to try to do something about the way G V U had been treated. I had made a complaint to the Local Authority. I was asked to attend a meeting at Woodhill House in Aberdeen to discuss G V U I sat with a lot of strangers in the room and told them the story about G V U I don't think that Thelma the social worker was there. I raised the issues of restraint and violence used against G V U There was no outcome as nothing ever happened.

### **Life after being in care**

65. It was apparent that G V U had no life skills when he came out of care. He was bewildered with what was going on. Thelma the social worker contacted G V U after he left Oakbank and enquired how he was getting on finding a job. His father tried to get him employment.
66. Unfortunately G V U life was taking a different path. I suspected that this was the case. I knew that he couldn't be a normal boy and that he was not going to find a job and get married and have children. I just knew I would never have grandchildren. He was too damaged and my husband and I both knew that the path he was taking we were unable to change.
67. He served a year sentence at Polmont Young Offenders but when he came out he was still the same person and was unable to cope. That was the last contact we had with Thelma his social worker.
68. When he was about 22 he committed a robbery with a knife. He needed to get money to pay his drug dealer. He was slashed in the face by the drug dealers and was so desperate he committed the armed robbery at a local shop using a knife. He swore to me that he never intended any harm to the girl who was serving in the shop.
69. He received a six year sentence at Shotts Prison. I would visit him but I didn't see a difference in the way he was. I recall collecting him from prison. I remember being interviewed at home by a social worker who asked a lot of questions. They asked if we were prepared for him coming home and if the neighbours knew that he was coming home. I could not understand the relevance of these questions.
70. When he first came home we got G V U on a methadone script and he was off heroin. He was trying hard to do something with his life. He had been clear of drugs for six months but his girlfriend who he now lived with was still smoking heroin.

71. One day I got a phone call from [REDACTED] to tell me that [REDACTED] GVU had collapsed in a place called [REDACTED] in Bridge of Don. I was off work that day so I jumped into my car and went there. When I arrived I started to do CPR on him. I told the people who were bystanders to phone an ambulance. I later learned that he had collapsed in the dealer's house and had been carried out onto the street. The dealer and his wife were just standing there in the street. The ambulance arrived but he was pronounced dead at the hospital.

**Impact and effect on [REDACTED] GVU life**

72. It is interesting to note that all the kids [REDACTED] GVU was in care with all died young. They were all damaged and unable to cope with life out of care. They were not prepared for living a normal life.
73. [REDACTED] GVU was a clever boy and was an avid reader. He could do crosswords very quickly. He drifted into a life of crime and was stealing and breaking into houses. I wouldn't give him money because I knew what he would do with it. When he was eighteen he was addicted to heroin.
74. [REDACTED] GVU was very good in company and was very friendly to visitors to the house. He also had a girlfriend. He never spoke about his feelings towards the police or the prison authorities. When he came out of Shotts Prison he had changed and stayed out of any trouble.
75. As I have already said [REDACTED] GVU was a very clever boy and when he died as a result of his overdose I think that he actually committed suicide. He knew that the [REDACTED] would be fatal. I just think that he couldn't cope with life anymore and had made up his mind. He couldn't fight authority any more.



## Impact

76. The impact on me and my family has been huge. I feel that I have been alienated from friends as my whole life revolved around GUV I would visit him every day when I finished work.
77. I worked as a nurse and I had to carry a bag with me at all times with all my valuables or GUV would steal them to buy drugs. My colleagues used to laugh at me with this huge bag. On one occasion he stole my bank card.
78. I always started off my day wondering what was going to happen. Whether the Police were going to call at my door or what state GUV would be in when I got home. When my husband was back from the rigs he would spend three weeks with GUV and I knew then that he would be safe. When I had to leave him on his own I would be worried all the time.
79. The rest of my family didn't know about GUV apart from my middle sister. When her daughter got married they didn't invite GUV I refused my invitation and it caused a lot of bad feeling in my family.
80. Neither my husband's nor my parents really knew what was going on but they had a wonderful relationship with GUV who was very fond of them. They were also very good to him.
81. I did receive help through counselling with occupational health at my work and my line manager was very understanding of the position I was in. Sometimes the police would come into my work to find me so I had to tell my managers what was happening. I often had to take some time off work when GUV was withdrawing from drugs and needed my support.
82. I think that I am quite an anxious person as a result of my experiences but I know that there is help out there and I have sought this help and will continue to do so if I am feeling down.

## **Reporting of Abuse**

83. G V U never reported what had happened to him to any authority. I tried to make a complaint to The local authority when I attended a meeting at Woodhill House in Aberdeen. I had made a written complaint. I told my story about G V U time in care and the effect that it had on me. I have not heard from them since and that was back in the late eighties.

## **Records**

84. I have never applied for G V U records.

## **Lessons to be learned**

85. There should be more support for the families and families should be more involved in the decision process. I felt that I was excluded and unable to have a say in what happened to my child. There should be more information given to the families. I didn't know what was happening to G V U when he was in care. It felt like there was a closed door and I was not being allowed in. Communication was very poor.
86. The social work department have one thought in mind and that is they can't go outside their guidelines. They should think outside the box as everyone is different. I think that they are very judgemental and I felt that I was on trial all the time.
87. I think that on reflection G V U suffered from ADHD which was not really known about at that time. I was never informed what they were doing to help G V U and so I realise on reflection all they were doing were punishing him. His real troubles all started when he was put into care.

## Other information

*Support Groups that I am a member of:*

88. I became a member of a substance bereavement group that was started up as a result of no one showing any interest in people who had been affected by a drug bereavement. I attended a yearlong part time course at university to learn some basic counselling skills. Substance Bereavement Support, Aberdeen meet as a group once a month with people who are like minded and understand how people are feeling. We recently attended an event in Glasgow where we planted flowers for all the people who died as a result of drugs. It was a campaign to seek help for people with drug problems rather than criminalising them.
89. [REDACTED] The Scottish Recovery Consortium and have also been involved with The Scottish Drug Forum.
90. I am also a Naloxone Peer Educator and have been involved in educating people to administer the drug if someone has taken an overdose. It is a potential life saver. I have received an award for the past six weeks for my work in this field supporting others. The awards are made by The Alcohol and Drug Action Group.
91. 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..... GVT [REDACTED] .....

Dated..... 18.6.2019. ....