

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Frances SMITH

Support person present: No

1. My name is Frances Susan Smith and when I was born my name was Frances Susan Thain. When I was married to my first husband, between 1972 and 1985, my name was Frances Susan Davidson and that was my name when I worked at Brimmond Assessment Centre. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1953. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Personal background and qualifications

2. I was born in Aberdeen and I went to Rosehill Primary school. I left school when I was almost fifteen years old with a leaving certificate for geography, history, maths and art. When I left school I was picked to be an apprentice hairdresser and I had always wanted to be a hairdresser but my mother wouldn't let me. It was rubbish money and I had to get a job.
3. I went from Grandholm Mill into the fish trade, filleting fish, because it was good money. I used to come out of my day job and do another job at night to make extra money. Both jobs were in the fish industry. I then left the fish industry and went to work for Aberdeen City Council as a home help. I was in my early twenties when I started working there and I did that for a number of years. Being a home help involved going to a person's house, cleaning it, making them a meal and making sure they're ok. I would go from house to house and it was mostly older people and people with dementia that I visited. There was no training.

4. In the early eighties I was offered a job in Brimmond Remand Home and the hours suited my needs because I needed to work and look after my kids so that's why I took the job. I think I was there from about 1980 until 1983 or 1984.

Brimmond Remand Home

Recruitment procedures

5. I can't remember how I found the job but I applied for the role of part time cook at Brimmond. I went for an interview and Mrs ERL the matron, interviewed me on her own. At the interview Mrs ERL just wanted to see what I was like and whether I was capable of cooking. She asked me if I could cook and I said that I was a good cook. I didn't need any qualifications and she just told me to start the next day. I wasn't asked to supply any references.

Structure

6. I think Brimmond was local authority and might have been run by Aberdeen City Council. Mrs ERL was the matron and her husband was there too but I don't know what he did. Their children [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] stayed with them in a house [REDACTED]. The house parents were Winnie Tough, KEF, Helen, KPP who was arrogant and cruel to the girls, and a couple called GJX and IFH. IFH worked mostly with the boys and he used to play football with them and take them out in the minibus. My ex-husband's friend's wife took a job in the laundry but I think she was only there for six months. She was Kathleen Dalgarno. There was another cook called Jane McPhee.
7. There was a lassie called Phyllis who worked in the laundry and she took up with KEF one of the house parents. He was going down to her house because she stayed near to Brimmond. I think KEF was with her and the matron. Matron and KEF were together and he couldn't do anything wrong in her eyes. A lot of people knew about it. KEF and Mrs ERL would go into the staff room and close the door. This went on for quite a long time.

8. I didn't see Mr **ERM** often. I only saw him when they needed extra staff to take kids down to the dining room. **KEF** stayed on the premises but the other staff members stayed round about Brimmond.
9. I never knew whether or not there was a complaint's process. Jane and I were co-workers so if I had any complaints then I had to go to matron and going to her would have been a waste of time.
10. The staff were under Mrs **ERL** thumb and they were frightened of her. She was just a little woman. **KPP** was very close to Mrs **ERL**

Personal role and duties

11. I would do certain days and Jane would do certain days. I used to end up with all the weekend work. I didn't work with Jane, I was there on my own. If she worked one day then I worked the next. I think I was in there from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm but sometimes I was there later.
12. I was responsible for the kitchen when I was on duty. I wore a white cooks coat and an apron which were both supplied. I would make breakfast, lunch and evening meals. I was meant to do everything in the kitchen including cleaning the dishes and ordering food.

Working at Brimmond Remand Home

General

13. Brimmond is in Bucksburn, Aberdeen. I know that it was a remand centre and the kids were in there because they had committed a crime. Some of them would tell you what they had done like shop-lifting or running away from home.

14. Brimmond had one driveway and it sat in its own grounds. It was a long building and if you look at the building from the front then you could see the matron's house attached to it. I think the boys' bedrooms were up stairs and girls' were downstairs.
15. I don't really know the inside of the building. I came in the side door at the back of the building which was the door into the kitchen. I used to park my car there. I had to knock on the door to get in because everything was under lock and key. The door in front of me as I went inside the building was the door into the kitchen. There was a long corridor which led to the big dining room where the kids used to go. If you went up the stairs then there was the laundry and next door to that was the staff dining room. Further up was the matron's office.
16. From the kitchen you could see the main front door and you could see people coming in. I knew there was a cell up the stairs but I only saw it from the outside after it had been pointed out to me by one of the kids, [REDACTED]. The staff used to put kids in there if they were kicking off big time.
17. I think there were about thirty boys and girls in Brimmond and the age range started at about eleven or twelve years old. The kids wore a mustard polo shirt with a stripe, brushed denim jeans and Jesus sandals.

First day at Brimmond Remand Home

18. On my first day I met Jane McPhee and I worked with her that morning. That was the only time that Jane and I worked together. The very first thing I was told by Jane when I arrived was to keep everything under lock and key and I was handed a pile of keys. We had to keep the back door shut in case someone escaped out of there and we had the keys attached to ourselves. We couldn't leave keys lying around and knives had to be locked up.
19. Brimmond had a big massive kitchen which she showed me round and then she showed me where the cupboards were and what was in them. She showed me how to order food because you had to do a weekly order.

20. Jane McPhee told me that the children were given something to eat before they went to their beds. She said that she didn't bother cooking for them but I used to bake them something like a Queen cake. She said it was up to me but she wouldn't cook for the kids. I just did my own thing.

Mealtimes

21. I saw into the dining room but I never went in. When the kids came down to the dining room, the girls were in one line and the boys were in another line. They lined up in the corridor and they came down separately. The way that the children were marched in and out of the dining room was very regimental and they weren't allowed to step out of line. KEF [REDACTED] Mr ERM [REDACTED] or one of the other house parents supervised the kids in the dining room. Which house parent supervised them in the dining room depended on which one had come down with them. All of the children were in the dining room at the same time but they weren't allowed to speak. If they spoke then a member of staff would stand and shout at them or they would be put in the kitchen to be punished. They had to say a prayer before every meal they ate.
22. I made sure that the kids had good food and they seemed quite happy with what I gave them. They had a choice of cereal for breakfast and then hot meals for lunch and dinner. I ordered the food and pleased myself as to what meals I gave the kids. The kids didn't have a choice of food but I tried to give them things that everyone would eat like homemade soup, custard or jam roly-poly. I served the children through a hatch and on a Saturday evening the house parents served the food so that I would get away early.
23. I told the house parents that if the kids wanted a second helping then they could have it but they never allowed that. The house parents said that one meal was adequate for them. When the kids came up to the hatch for the food I would tell them what was on the menu and they would tell me what they wanted so they didn't need to take anything that they didn't want and there was nothing left on their plates.
24. I'm not sure if the kids were happy with the food that the other cook, Jane McPhee, gave them. She had grown up in a children's home and she didn't seem to like any of

the kids. She was quite cruel to them. I did a lot of home baking for the kids and they got that before they went to their beds at night. I would leave it out in the kitchen at night for the house parents to come and get for the kids along with a big jug of juice. Jane would make the kids jam sandwiches at lunch time and leave them sitting out until they were to have it, just before bed time, so the bread was stale. The kids told me about that. I got on well with all the kids. They would stick their heads in to the kitchen and say "great, its Frances today, it's not that bitch" meaning Jane.

25. The staff didn't eat with the children, they ate in their own dining room. The staff ate the same food as the kids. I put food into ovens into the staff room for them.
26. Mrs ERL own children were never out of the home. They were always helping themselves to food out of the cupboards. She was meant to buy food for her own house but they just took food out of the cupboards in the kitchen.

Trips and holidays

27. I used to take kids out at the weekend along with my own three kids. If I was off then I would ask the matron if I could take the kids out and she would say yes or no. I used to take a lassie called and her sister out. They were the only kids I was allowed to take out. I tried to take others but Mrs ERL wouldn't let me. I didn't ask for a reason when she said no. The matron had her favourites and she had ones that she had no time for. was the apple of the matron's eye.
28. I would take the kids to the park and then I would take them for a snack. I would bring them back by 4:00 pm. I wasn't allowed to have them overnight and that was just as well because I had my own three kids. We went to carnivals, the pictures, the beach or the park. I did two weekends working and two weekends off so I would take kids out about twice a month when I was off at the weekend.

Schooling

29. I was told that there were classrooms in the basement and I don't remember them going out to school. I don't think they were really taught anything but I don't know what they did during the day.
30. There were three girls, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who were about fourteen or fifteen who went out to school. They would be taken to Bankhead Academy in a minibus and then picked up.

Visitors / Inspections

31. At the weekends some of the parents used to visit the kids and I would stand with a lump in my throat because it was sad. None of the kids got home at the weekend and some of them never saw their parents.
32. I never spoke to the parents when they visited but I made tea, coffee and some home baking. The visits took place in the dining room and they weren't supervised. The parents would come in the front door and be taken to the dining room by a house parent and then they would go and get the child. The parents and the kids sat across the table from each other like a prison visit. I think visiting was 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

Abuse at Brimmond Remand Home

33. The only times that I saw the kids were morning, lunch and evening but I sometimes saw some of the kids if they were put in the kitchen during the day for being naughty.
34. KEF [REDACTED] who was a house parent, brought children to the kitchen quite a lot for misbehaving. It used to happen practically every shift that I would be on. KEF [REDACTED] would come in and say "get that little bastard on his hands and knees" to scrub the floor and then he would tell me that if there were any other jobs then I was to get the kids to do them. I never got the kids to do the jobs that I had to do because I had plenty of time during the day so I would do them myself. KEF [REDACTED] wanted the kids to scrub the floor with a toothbrush which was kept in the kitchen. He would leave the kids with me for two to four hours and then he would come back later to see how they were getting on. KEF [REDACTED] would ask me if it had been done and I said that it had but really we wet the floor

with a mop and let him think that they had scrubbed it with a toothbrush. It was terrible that you had to tell lies like that but I felt sorry for the kids. I used to tell them to hide in the cupboard and have a juice and a packet of crisps. I would stand and look through the door of the kitchen because there was a pane of glass and I told them that, if I saw anyone coming down the corridor, I would cough and then they would have to get out and get back on their hands and knees.

35. KEF would just appear at any time and he was the only one who used to bring children to the kitchen to be punished. KEF may have been in his late thirties but I'm not sure. He had a different accent to us and he sounded more English.
36. The kids that I remember being told to scrub the floor were a laddie called and a laddie called They were in their early teens. I think they must have been giving him cheek and that's why they were brought to the kitchen. I used to hear them laughing in the dining room and then KEF would go mental.
37. I don't know what other types of discipline were used and I didn't interfere. I just took the kids under my wing when they came into the kitchen. The children were sometimes sent down to do dishes as a punishment if they were naughty but that was normally my job.
38. I remember a laddie called who was brain damaged and he couldn't have been any older than nine years old. He was playing up big time so they put him into Brimmond which was a disgrace. He should never have been in there because it wasn't for him. was taking the mickey out of Mr ERM and Mr ERM hit him with an open hand across the side of the head. just laughed at him but he didn't know what was going on because he was mentally disabled. used to get egged on by the other kids to tease Mr ERM so he was often hit across the head and sometimes Mr ERM would have his keys in his hand when he hit One minute was there and the next he was gone but I couldn't say how long he was in there for.

39. Mr ^{ERM} had his keys hanging from a chain down his right hand side near his trouser pocket and he would often hit the children across the head with his hand having the keys in them.
40. When I worked there [REDACTED] was put in a cell. I don't know what he had done to be placed in there but when he was in the cell he [REDACTED] slit his wrists. That happened when I was there and I knew about it because the kids told me about it. I saw ambulance staff coming in and staff running. I don't remember if I saw him again after that. A lot of children came and went and some were there longer than others. [REDACTED] was there for a long time. I think I have read in the papers that he has since killed himself.
41. One Saturday, while I was working, a boy called ^{KML} who was only eight years old came in to Brimmond for the first time. He had come from the Froghall area of Aberdeen and some bigger boys from that area had poured glue down his throat. He was just coming in the door when I was going up to the laundry to put in dish towels. ^{KEF} and ^{IFH} were both holding him because he was really kicking off. They put him in the cell because he was kicking off but he was gasping for breath. I asked if they were going to get a doctor because he was gasping but I never saw a doctor come in and I kept an eye on the door because I was worried about that kid. ^{KEF} and ^{IFH} put him in the cell and he was screaming, breaking his heart. That was the last I saw of that kid so I don't know what happened. I know his name was ^{KML} because I heard ^{KEF} and ^{IFH} shouting it. I also heard ^{KEF} say "get this little fucker into the cell"

Peer Abuse

42. Some of the girls were bullies and they used to rule the other girls and get the other girls to do things for them. They used to bribe the younger girls with cigarettes but I don't know where they were getting them to do. [REDACTED] told me about that. These girls got out of Brimmond to go to Bankhead Academy school so they might have got the cigarettes there. There was an [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

██████ and they were the three bullies. Everyone was frightened of them including the staff. Winnie Tough used to mollycoddle them and take them under her wing. She knew what they were like but she would brush it off and laugh. Winnie didn't stand up to them. They were about fourteen or fifteen.

Leaving Brimmond

43. I left Brimmond in 1984 because I was offered a better job with better money. I got a night shift job working in Wigginsteape paper mill in Dice. I was making £400 a week in there and that's the reason why I left. I had worked there previously during the evenings and on a Friday afternoon and then they started a nightshift so I put my name forward and got the job. I did four eleven hour shifts a week.
44. I gave Mrs ERL ██████ one week's notice in writing. She came down to the dining room and I spoke to her through the hatch. I kept my voice low and told her I was resigning and handed her the letter. She asked me why I was leaving and I told her it was for a better job with better hours and more money. I worked the week and then left. I wasn't given a leaving gift and no one said goodbye to me except for some of the kids. The kids were sad that I was leaving. Some of the house parents, like Winnie and GJX ██████ that I got on alright with, asked me why I was leaving and I told them I had a better job. They said that they didn't blame me for leaving.
45. I 1985 I found out my husband was having an affair and I went off on the sick. The following year I divorced and I moved away from the area altogether.
46. I went to work for Aberdeen City Council as a home help in 1985. Aberdeen City Council asked for references and I gave one from Wigginsteape and a character reference. I did that for five years and then I went back to college and did a secretarial course in the 90s. I then did various jobs and then became a facilities manager for the schools. I was there from 2003 and I left in 2017 or 2018. I was caring part time for a boy called ██████ who had a sever chromosome disease. He was five when I cared for him and I did that for four years at the weekends. I recently worked for cornerstone but I was paid off after nine months there. I've appealed their decision. I had been a team

member looking after four guys in a unit and I was working nights. They were all in their sixties. I'm currently looking for a job as I get fed up being at home.

Reporting to police / criminal proceedings

47. What was happening in Brimmond wasn't right and it should have been dealt with years ago but I didn't want to rock the boat because I worked there. I never reported anything. The atmosphere was terrible and it wasn't a good place to work but it was a job and at that time I had three young kids to look after and my husband never gave me a penny.

Lessons to be learned

48. I think the way that Brimmond was run was a total disaster and I would never have put ERL-ERM for a start. I don't know how they got their jobs. The way the kids were treated was a disgrace and it should have been dealt with a long time ago. The care commission exists now and staff are thoroughly checked. There should have been something like that back then. My cousin told me that Mrs ERL is still living and she is in a big house on in Aberdeen. She is in her eighties now.
49. I never saw anyone inspecting Brimmond and no one asked me how I felt things were being run. There should have been unannounced inspections and that should be in place now.
50. I think that everyone knew what was going on in Brimmond. All of the staff knew but they were petrified of Mrs ERL and they went along with her. I don't think people outside knew what was happening. What happened in Brimmond, stayed in Brimmond and it shouldn't have. I think it's the same now and if you report things to the police then they aren't interested and don't want to know. They tell you that it's a civil matter and you should see a lawyer.

Other information

51. I recently came across a video on Facebook that had been filmed by a former resident of Brimmond called Peter Stuart Kelbie. I watched the video half way through and it showed him going round the outside of Brimmond and he was pointing out what was what. He spoke about his time there and he was with a woman who might have been his wife. I tried to contact him but he never responded.
52. [REDACTED] was in Brimmond as a resident so I asked her if she had seen the video and she told me who he was. I think Peter Stuart Kelbie was at Brimmond at the same time as [REDACTED] but I don't think he was there when I was there. I never asked [REDACTED] what dates she was in Brimmond.
53. I felt horrible seeing the video so I only watched it half way through and then I stopped it. It brought back horrible memories. My memories are sad because of the way that the children were treated. I don't like to live in the past. I like to look forward.
54. 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.....[REDACTED].....

Dated.....2/12/20.....