

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Sara REID

Support person present: No

1. My name is Sara Reid. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1966 and I was born in Dundee. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Introduction

2. I am the youngest of four children. My mother and father, lived and worked in Dundee and they have, worked within social work establishments, for the majority of my life.
3. My father worked at Balgowan List D school in Dundee at the time of my birth. My mother was a child minder at that point, she hadn't started working in social work. We lived on site and we were there until I was about five.
4. The family then moved to Calder House Assessment Centre in Blantyre, where both my parents were SNR [REDACTED] That was for about another year and a half and once again we lived on site. Then when I was about seven my parents were offered SNR [REDACTED] jobs at Brimmond Assessment Centre in Aberdeen.
5. We did live on site at the first two establishments but I didn't have any dealings with the children staying at either of those places. However, when we were at Brimmond Assessment Centre we were living on site, and the house was actually adjoined to the centre. I was involved in many activities with the children staying there, I was even eating with the children. It became a far more integral part of my childhood life.

6. My father had formal training and, when I was born, I believe he was teaching at a List 'D' school. He then went to university and did a psychology course, so he had formal qualifications.
7. I remember my mother was child minding when we lived at Balgowan but she went on to do a course, I don't know what that was, but she did become SNR SNR with my father. I never really asked them about their qualifications, it was something I just didn't do.

Brimmond Assessment Centre, Aberdeen

General

8. My mum and dad were SNR at Brimmond and, as such, were responsible for SNR. They had a lot of staff and twenty five children, twenty boys and five girls. They were generally all secondary school age children and, in the main, they were educated on site.
9. On occasions, there were younger children at Brimmond, and I do remember a couple of refugee kids being there. That was because there was nowhere else for them to go, so they stayed at Brimmond for a while. The younger of the boys was only about five or six years old.
10. Brimmond was out in the country and a little bit out of the way, so it was fairly isolated. We would go to school, then come home and have our meals with all the children in the canteen in the centre. Or we would go and get our food and bring it back to the house.
11. Brimmond was a locked establishment, it would have been described, in the day, as a place for juvenile delinquents. That is obviously not the terminology that would be used nowadays. It was secure though, and the external doors and the doors

connecting our house to the main building all locked automatically behind you when they closed. There were no outside activities for the children unless they were supervised.

12. Brimmond was an assessment centre so the children were supposed to come in on a twenty one day order to be assessed. The idea was that there would be psychological testing and a general assessment of the child and their family, before the child was put in any permanent situation.
13. That was the idea, but there were some children stayed longer than the three weeks. I remember one boy, GLO [REDACTED] was actually there for about six years. That was the longest stay I was ever aware of.
14. The children would go to Children's Hearings in an effort to find appropriate places for them, on a long term basis, but there must have just been some children they couldn't find appropriate places for.
15. As far as I'm aware GLO [REDACTED] would have gone to Children's Panels, but I don't remember them coming up again and again for him. He was just always there, it was like another kid living in your house for six years. I don't know how frequent his Panel assessments were, it was just odd that he was there such a long time. Most of the kids were there for much shorter periods of time.

Description

16. Brimmond was a purpose built, modern unit and we, as a family, were the first people to move in there. It was one building, with separate areas for the boys, and girls, to live in. There were locked doors between the boys and girls areas.
17. They would come together for all their meals and for education and activities, things like that.

18. Some of the windows were unbreakable glass and there was also a cell. It was a single room and it had an unbreakable glass window. It was up the stairs and it had a bed which was attached to the floor. It didn't have any other furniture in it, that I recall.
19. The unbreakable glass was a plastic type material and if you banged on it, it would vibrate and move. It was scratched and written on, but you could see through it, it wasn't very clear, but it was a big piece of glass.
20. The cell itself was a normal size of room, there just wasn't much in it. There was a door that went out to a separate area with a toilet, but you couldn't get instant access to the toilet. Someone would have to come and get you if you wanted to go to the toilet. There was a buzzer in the cell that the kids could buzz if they needed to speak to someone.
21. I do remember seeing staff standing outside the cell while a child was in the cell. The child would be inside kicking off, shouting and screaming, and the staff would just stand and wait until the child had let off steam and calmed down a bit.
22. Our house was actually joined on to the centre, as was the house that SNR stayed in. SNR were GJO-GJP
23. Our whole family stayed in SNR house. I went to school at Bankhead Academy in Aberdeen when I was at Brimmond.

Staffing

24. My mum and dad were SNR, GJP and GJO were SNR and then there were quite a lot of child care staff. There were student placements for social workers in training and there was quite a high, staff to child ratio in there. The children were only there for a fairly short period of time and they were being watched and monitored.

25. A lot of the children were being placed in a locked establishment, because they were either a danger to themselves or to other people. I imagine that would be a reason to have a higher, staff to child ratio, than there might have been at other units.
26. The staff I remember are FFI [REDACTED], who went on to become [REDACTED] as he married [REDACTED] GJQ [REDACTED] Harry Baron, IFH [REDACTED], KEE [REDACTED] Dave Smith and Helen Cruickshank. [REDACTED] to GJO-GJP [REDACTED] GJO-GJP [REDACTED]
27. There were some really caring members of staff at Brimmond. They would do their absolute utmost to help the children settle in to that secure environment. The children were coming to stay in a locked establishment and they weren't getting a choice in it. That was a very unnerving and unsettling situation for children of that age and I remember seeing children coming in and being very upset.
28. There were quite a lot of younger staff, who were new into social work and were in training. I don't know anyone who goes into social work for any reason other than because it's a totally positive thing to do. They believe they do a good job and it's a good thing to do.
29. I perceived the staff to be very caring people and I was always very comfortable with all of them. They treated the kids in a very respectful way and all I feel I ever saw was positive interactions between staff and children.
30. There were some older members of staff and I would see them give kids a fatherly ruffle of their hair or an arm round the shoulder, and tell the kids they would be fine. I think that informal action was good and it did depend on which staff member the kid made a bond with. You would see some kids get on particularly well with certain members of staff.
31. There was a staff room on the upper floor, where the staff all met and discussed how their day had been. I remember hearing them talking about how things had been,

and if the time was right for kids to be moved on to the next stage. It was definitely a collective staff decision that was made about the progress of the children.

32. I do remember kids going to Children's Panels during their time at Brimmond, and often, when it got to the end of the twenty one day assessment period, there would be a Panel where they would discuss what had happened during the course of their time at Brimmond.
33. This may just be my perception, but I got the feeling that it was often longer than the, twenty one days, before the decision was getting made. That may have been because three weeks isn't really a lot of time to decide what's best for a child.
34. I'm not sure exactly who was in charge of recruiting staff at Brimmond, but I think it would generally have been my father. There may have been a panel with a children's service manager or equivalent, perhaps something like that, I don't know.
35. My overall impression of the staff at Brimmond was that they were a group of people who were trying to get the most positive outcome they could for the children. They weren't doing it with a single focus, but looking at all the ways in which they could make it some kind of positive environment for the children.

Routine at Brimmond Assessment Centre

Mornings and bedtime

36. My daily routine was very much different from the children in the assessment centre. I would get up in the morning and go to school, and when I was at primary school, I came home for lunch. In secondary I usually had my lunch at school.
37. My mum once told me that when the kids came in to stay in the centre they were asked if they were used to sleeping on their own or with other people in the room. If they were used to a single room, there were single rooms in the centre that could be

used. Most children preferred being in rooms with other people. I think it was about making things less scary for the children.

38. In the sleeping area, where all the kids were, there were some rooms with four or six beds and some rooms with just single beds. In our house I shared a bedroom with my sister and my two brothers shared a bedroom but there were some occasions, when I would sleep in the centre alongside the children.

Mealtimes/Food

39. We had all our meals in the canteen, which was in the centre. They were prepared by the cook and the domestic staff, who were generally people that lived locally. The meals were at set times every day and we all ate together. We all ate the same food and the food was great.
40. We had a large amount of good home cooking. Things like mince and tatties, just good wholesome food. I remember we had hot dogs on a Saturday, which was seen as a treat. The food was good enough for everyone and there was never a question of my mother and father saying it wasn't good enough for their own children.
41. Sometimes the kids even got a say in what they wanted and they could ask for a favourite food or something they liked. Generally I would say that none of our family had any particular issues with any of the food.
42. I remember a lot of the kids were skinny and pale when they came in. They almost always put on weight by the time they left. There were no issues over the food. We would all get our meals and sit and chat. There was no having to sit quietly or anything like that.
43. At night time the kids tended to get a cup of tea or a juice before going to bed or a wee sweetie or something while they were sitting in the evening.

44. Me, my brothers and sister would sometimes get the food and take it back to our own house but sometimes we would all eat in the canteen. I would say it was about half and half. There was always staff in the room when we were eating and there was a separate room where staff could get a break and eat their meals.
45. As a mother of three myself, I can say that there's always incidents where kids may be given something to eat that they don't like or aren't used to. At the centre, there was the potential for that happening but I have no recollection of anything ever kicking off, or there being any particular issue over someone not liking or not wanting to eat the food.
46. I imagine my mother's attitude would have been the same as she was with us. If something was put down for a kid to eat and they didn't want to eat it, they could leave whatever it was they didn't like, but they would not get offered anything else.

Washing / bathing

47. I did all my washing and bathing in our own house. I do know the girls area in the centre was smaller than the boys area. The boys had a big shower area on the ground floor beside the gym, so they tended to do communal showering.
48. There was also a separate shower area upstairs, on the bedroom floor, that had three or four shower cubicles. There were quite a few children that were bedwetters so they would tend to go there first thing in the morning to get washed.

Leisure

49. Brimmond had a very large area around about it, there was a three quarters enclosed concrete five-a-side football pitch, a big football field and the assault course. There was plenty of area for the kids to play.

50. We did join in many of the activities with the kids, things like going for walks, swimming, playing football and doing the assault course. There was a fair bit of physical activity and we just tended to go along, as it was on our door step.
51. There was also a gym on site, with a climbing wall, a pool table and that kind of thing. In the evenings the kids would always tend to have structured activities like football, or woodwork, or going swimming, things like that. Me and my brothers and sister would frequently be involved in the evening activities.
52. There was a nice atmosphere at Brimmond. I remember my mum and dad setting up a wee disco in the gym hall, every year at New Year. They just tried to make things as normal as possible and sometimes to have those wee special events.

Trips and holidays

53. We went on trips, I remember going to an outdoor centre, I think it was an army establishment, at Edzel. We went to Tomintoul to an outdoor centre away up in the hills. That could be a weekend trip and would be for the kids that weren't able to go home.
54. We would all get bundled into the minibus and go off with them all. It tended to be our parents that were organising those trips so it wasn't likely we would be left at home. I really enjoyed those trips, they were great fun. I would say there was a trip away to somewhere on the majority of weekends.
55. If we stayed away overnight, I would just share in the same accommodation as the kids. We tended to stay in outdoor centres, so it would be hostel type beds with bunkbeds and dormitories. There was never any problem with any of that.
56. I spent quite a lot of time with the other young people and every now and again, just like any group of teenage boys and girls, somebody wouldn't like something somebody did. So there would be bickering, but I can't remember seeing anything particularly negative that was directed towards me.

57. I made many friends as I grew up, because the kids at Brimmond were increasingly closer to my age. I remember a few friends, HWF [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED], they were all boys that were at Brimmond.
58. I was a bit of a tomboy, my brothers were very sporty and my sister was very girly. She was married when I was just eleven years old, so she was away, and if I was stuck for something to do, I would just go out and play football with the boys. There was always more boys at the centre than girls.

School

59. In the main, I went to school with my brothers and sister, but occasionally, if there were children at the centre being transitioned back into main stream education they were sometimes sent with us to school.
60. Other than those who might be in transition, the children in the centre were all educated on site. It was a kind of generic teaching regime, with reading and writing and things like art and woodwork. I don't imagine it was curriculum based.
61. There were generic teachers who came in, and taught on site, in the building. There was a couple of small classrooms and a woodwork room. I remember a woodwork teacher and an art teacher coming in to teach.
62. The kids at Brimmond had school for a few hours in the morning and then again in the afternoon.
63. The ones that were in transition and out at school were the ones they tried to keep in mainstream education, so they could sit exams, keep their education going and remain in an educational environment.

Clothing / uniform

64. Generally, all the kids wore the jeans and jumper that were provided. I remember piles of jeans and jumpers. It wasn't a uniform as such, just all different sizes of jeans and jumpers. It wasn't their own clothes. I wore the same sometimes, if I was out playing. By and large, I would have looked remarkably like the rest of the children.

Healthcare

65. The children were all taken to the Denburn Health Clinic in the centre of Aberdeen. That tended to be done quite early in the process. When the kids arrived they were asked if they'd been to the dentist recently and if they hadn't, then appointments were made. I went to the same dentist as all the kids and I remember going along to the dentist with kids that were staying at the centre. We often had appointments alongside one another.
66. I don't recall a great deal about health care screening. I don't remember many kids being injured and needing any medical attention.
67. I do remember a boy once throwing a chair through a window. It was in an attempt to run away and he then dived headfirst out the window. He landed on the glass and cut himself, that was the only big injury, with blood, that I remember. My mum took him away to hospital.

Religious instruction

68. My parents were members of the church at the top of the hill where we lived. It was the Church of Scotland at Newhills. We all went to church as children and I do remember the youth fellowship coming to Brimmond some evenings. It tended not to be terribly religious. They would bring guitars and sing songs and the kids would join in. There was no preaching in any way.
69. I don't remember saying prayers or anything like that. The only religious aspect I remember was the youth fellowship which was a more fun side of religion.

Chores

70. There were cooks and domestics and a handyman so things like laundry, cleaning and cooking were all basically done by the staff. The only chores the kids would be expected to help with were things like clearing up, tidying and washing up. They would make beds and just do things they would be expected to do in a normal family.
71. I don't think that was so much about keeping the place clean, because that was being done, it was more about helping out. The staff were very integral parts of the team and the kids could get quite attached to them. Some kids might have hated helping out but some didn't and would be happy to help out and to get involved.

Birthdays and Christmas

72. There were birthday celebrations, I remember that. GLO [REDACTED] who was there for six years, had most of his childhood birthdays with us and he got a cake or something like that.
73. At Christmas time the majority of children went home. They tried to do that at weekends as well, where possible, as part of the transitioning back to being at home.
74. Weekends and holidays, like Christmas, therefore tended to be the time where there would be the smallest amount of children in the centre. There would be a big Christmas lunch for the handful of children left in the centre. That would be about five or six kids.
75. Christmas lunch would also be in the canteen and my parents and maybe one or two other staff would be the only ones working. There would be less staff needed. We would have our Christmas meal there. My grandparents and family members would also be there and that was a more informal and casual time.

76. It was a big Christmas dinner with crackers and things like that. I remember local businesses in Aberdeen donated to the centre, so the children that were left got presents and trips to the pantomime or something nice like that.
77. Our house was adjoined to the centre, but obviously separated by a locked door. We opened our own presents with our family, in our house, on Christmas day and then we would have joined any children at the centre for the meal, or for a movie or something like that.
78. My mother and father, and the majority of staff at Brimmond definitely viewed it as a vocation, rather than a career, and I did see them trying to make things as positive as possible. They were always trying to make it as normal an environment and as positive an experience as they could.

Visits

79. There was quite a lot of interaction with the families of the children. Looking back on it now I would say there was quite a holistic approach with inclusion of family and parents. There was weekend visits with family, or parents were brought in to spend time with their children.
80. Visiting was quite organic as it would depend on when parents were available, but there was quite an effort to get the kids out and home at weekends. It might start with the kids getting home for a couple of hours on a Saturday and then they would get an overnight for one night and then perhaps two nights.
81. The kids would get dropped off and picked up from their homes, by staff, and that would then change, to them coming back by themselves, by bus, for a certain time at night.

Running away

82. If we were out on a walk or outside playing, sometimes the kids would just take off across the fields. The police would be informed if the kids ran away and I remember police bringing kids back. The kids would be spoken to and there would be an exploration as to why they ran off.
83. I remember two kids once ran off when they were out walking our Dalmatian dog. They ran off but were rather conspicuous, wearing the jeans and jumpers and being with a Dalmatian. They actually deposited our dog in a telephone box and disappeared off. That was a sad occurrence for me as a child.
84. I remember my brothers were sometimes told to head off across the fields after the kids when they ran off. More often than not the children were just trying to see if they could do it, then they would get caught by my brothers and brought back.
85. You would hear the kids saying they were missing their mum and they were going to run off to see their mum. The kids were often only thirteen years old and just wanted to be with their mums.
86. I do remember one child once coming and saying they missed their mum and that's why they had run off. My mum told them they would get the mum, but they had to stay at Brimmond because the staff were all there to help them.
87. I also remember the [REDACTED] family. There was three kids, [REDACTED] who was the older sister, a middle brother, I forget his name, and a wee brother, [REDACTED] Wee [REDACTED] would sometimes come over and sit on my mother's knee. Some of the kids just seemed so young, to be away from their mums.
88. [REDACTED] once said to me that sometimes, when he was sitting on my mums knee, she would rub his back. He said to me that he had tried doing that to himself but that it never felt the same. I remember thinking how sad that was.

Bedwetting

89. I remember once discussing with my mum, some of the things a child would be asked when they came into the centre. The kids were asked if they slept in their own bed, were they used to having something they usually cuddled in bed at night and if they wet the bed.
90. There were quite a few bedwetters and I remember that was discussed quite openly, among the staff. If the kids did wet the bed, they would just get a rubber sheet put on their bed as part of the process.
91. The children were told, they weren't the only ones that wet their beds and that it happened to a lot of children, especially when they're a bit scared. If they did wet the bed it was never an issue, the kids just put their wet sheets outside the room, got themselves cleaned up and the sheets went off to the laundry.
92. I remember my mum explaining that to me and saying it was something that tended to happen to boys and girls when they were in that kind of situation and were a bit scared. The effort was made to try and make the kids not feel bad about it, to minimise and normalise it and just move on, not focus on it too much.

Discipline

93. The cell was not where children tended to sleep overnight and I don't remember it being used for anyone to sleep overnight. I remember it being described as a place for children to be taken who were a danger to themselves or others. It was for children who had completely lost control and they would sit in there until they had calmed down.
94. It was a different era I suppose, I don't think we do those things now. I do remember children being put in the cell as they were having an absolute 'flaky'. They would be banging and banging on the glass, so that's why I think it had to be unbreakable glass.

95. They would stay in there until they had calmed down and then they would come out. I don't think it was a punishment as such. I would have thought that most staff could have put a kid in the cell, as it would have been reactive, and then SNR SNR or SNR would need to be informed.

96. A punishment would have been something more like, not allowing the child to get out to play, or not allowing the child a positive, like a treat or something like that.

Interaction with the children

97. I would say that interaction between me, my brothers and sister and the children at Brimmond, was encouraged.
98. When we went to school, with the children from Brimmond that went to mainstream school, mum or dad would ask us to keep an eye on them. We would make sure they knew where to go at the canteen and that kind of thing. There was a sense that we were expected to do our bit and interact appropriately with the kids.
99. At weekends, if there was a kid who wasn't going home, my mum would ask me to take them swimming or to have them join in the activities we were involved in.
100. I remember, as a typical surly teenager, I might not really want that but mum would then explain that not every kid had as much as we had. Mum would tell me that we were very lucky as we had a family round about us and that some people didn't have it so good. She would say it would be kindly and it might mean an awful lot to somebody, so there was that. My mum never went into the actual backgrounds of any of the children.

Abuse at Brimmond Assessment Centre

101. The only negative incident I ever saw at Brimmond was when there was a group of children out playing on the five-a-side football pitch. There was a glass window, into

the canteen, nearby and one of the kids, [REDACTED] kicked the football hard and it smacked against the window.

102. I was out playing at that point and I remember thinking that it must have been really close to breaking the window.
103. A member of staff, KEF [REDACTED], who had either been on the pitch, or had just come out from the canteen, to see what had happened, pulled [REDACTED] to one side and said "what was that?". [REDACTED] said it had been the football and KEF [REDACTED] punched [REDACTED] in the face. It was a full punch with a clenched fist. [REDACTED] was just a small boy, about twelve or thirteen years old, and KEF [REDACTED] was a big grown man.
104. I would have been about the same age as [REDACTED] at the time. I saw that happen and I remember thinking I would probably have said the same thing as [REDACTED] had said.
105. When KEF [REDACTED] punched [REDACTED] he called him a smart arse or cheeky, something like that, and I just thought that I would have given a similar response. I didn't know what [REDACTED] could have done differently.
106. With the wisdom of experience I would have said something, I would have said sorry, but I wasn't particularly comfortable with KEF [REDACTED] either. I found him to be a bully.
107. KEF [REDACTED] was the only member of staff that I felt a bit uncomfortable with. He was one of those men who really liked the athletic kids and would praise them all the time. He was at Brimmond for a few years but I don't know exactly how long.
108. KEF [REDACTED] did tend to rant but I don't recall anyone else ever mentioning him being physical with a child and I didn't see any other incident. He tended to be an aggressively vocal chap.

109. [REDACTED] was decidedly not one of those great kids. He wasn't athletic or particularly pretty, he just wasn't one of those kids who had a lot going for him. I always felt a bit sorry for him.

Reporting of abuse at Brimmond Assessment Centre

110. I didn't tell anyone about that incident. KEF [REDACTED] was never inappropriate with me at all. I think, he was just a bit more aggressive in his natural demeanour. He was a bit of an alpha male.
111. Most of the staff were very encouraging and positive, very nurturing. KEF [REDACTED] could be positive and encouraging but it tended to be with the ones who were more capable, very good at football or always in the gym. He was comfortable with that environment and I just don't think he was very good at dealing with the ones who had a little less to offer.
112. I do wish I had said something about that at the time. I didn't say anything to anybody. I don't know if my parents did know about it, perhaps after [REDACTED] got back inside he told them but I don't know. He would have had an injury as I'm pretty sure the punch burst his lip, it was a pretty big smack in the mouth.
113. Whether KEF [REDACTED] said anything I don't know, but I doubt that very much. He certainly stayed on working there, so perhaps [REDACTED] said he was hit in the face with the football. I believe KEF [REDACTED] is dead now.

Life after Brimmond Assessment Centre

114. We left Brimmond when I was about seventeen and moved into our own house for the first time. My dad retired and my mother went on to work at Seafeld Children's Home, Airyhall Children's Home and at Cordyce School. Cordyce was an education

establishment for children not managing in mainstream education. My mum retired after Cordyce.


115. Over the subsequent years I would say I didn't particularly talk about Brimmond with my siblings or my mum and dad. Sometimes one of us might be walking around town and we would meet one of the kids. If I ever met any of the boys, that used to be at Brimmond, they would always ask about my brothers.
116. One of my brothers went on to work in social work and the other went on to be a policeman. Both of them could have ongoing interaction with the people that were at Brimmond so occasionally they would bump into one another and catch up.
117. I went to work in radio, then I worked with the Child Protection Team and then I went on to work with Aberdeenshire Council in ICT communications. That's what I do now.

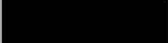
Hopes for the Inquiry

118. I'm aware, having bumped into a child that was at Brimmond, that [REDACTED] might be dead. I feel terrible about that because, if I'd ever bumped into [REDACTED] I would have wanted to say to him that I was aware of what happened to him, and, if he had ever wanted to do anything about it, I would have been quite happy and comfortable to back him up. I didn't have the opportunity to do that.
119. The majority of the things I saw happen at Brimmond were all positive but there's no point in pretending that the assault on [REDACTED] did not happen. It's one of those times where you would like to hope that the positive interaction that exists, for looking after children, will continue and we would learn from that.
120. When things happen, that you think weren't exactly great, those kind of things need to stop happening. I'm sure some of it has stopped, but it's ensuring those things do stop, that, I suppose, is my hope for the Inquiry.

Other information

121. 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...  25/11/19