

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GGG

Support person present: No.

1. My name is GGG. My date of birth is 1970. My contact details are known to the inquiry.

Background

2. I'm a middle child. I have an older sister called and a younger sister called. I later found out that I had other stepsiblings but I wasn't aware of this at the time I went into care.

Life before being placed into care

3. I originally lived in Paisley in a house with my mum, dad and sisters. I remember going to my granny's in Port Glasgow quite a bit. I'm not sure how many times or for how long I visited my granny. It all seemed to happen after my younger sister was born.
4. My mum got a flat in Port Glasgow. I stayed with my mum and my two sisters in that flat. At the time I didn't know why my dad wasn't living with us. I later found out that my mum and dad had split up. My dad had been 'sewing his oats'. That's how I ended up having other stepsiblings.
5. I have a recollection of being in a big office. I remember my mum being there. She was having an argument with someone. The next thing I remember was that I was

living with my paternal grandmother and my Auntie [REDACTED]. I don't know how long we stayed there but my next memory is that we were sitting at my Auntie [REDACTED]'s table and a guy was asking us whether we'd like to go to a new school. Later on I recall my Auntie [REDACTED] barricading my sisters and I in her flat with her. I remember a table and chair being put against her door. I later found out that she had done that because the social worker had come to take us away. My Auntie [REDACTED] had said that was not happening. After that, and within what seemed like a relatively quick period, my sister [REDACTED] and I were placed in residential care in Largs. My younger sister, [REDACTED], wasn't placed in care with us. She stayed with my Auntie [REDACTED].

Barrholm Children's Home, Largs, Ayrshire

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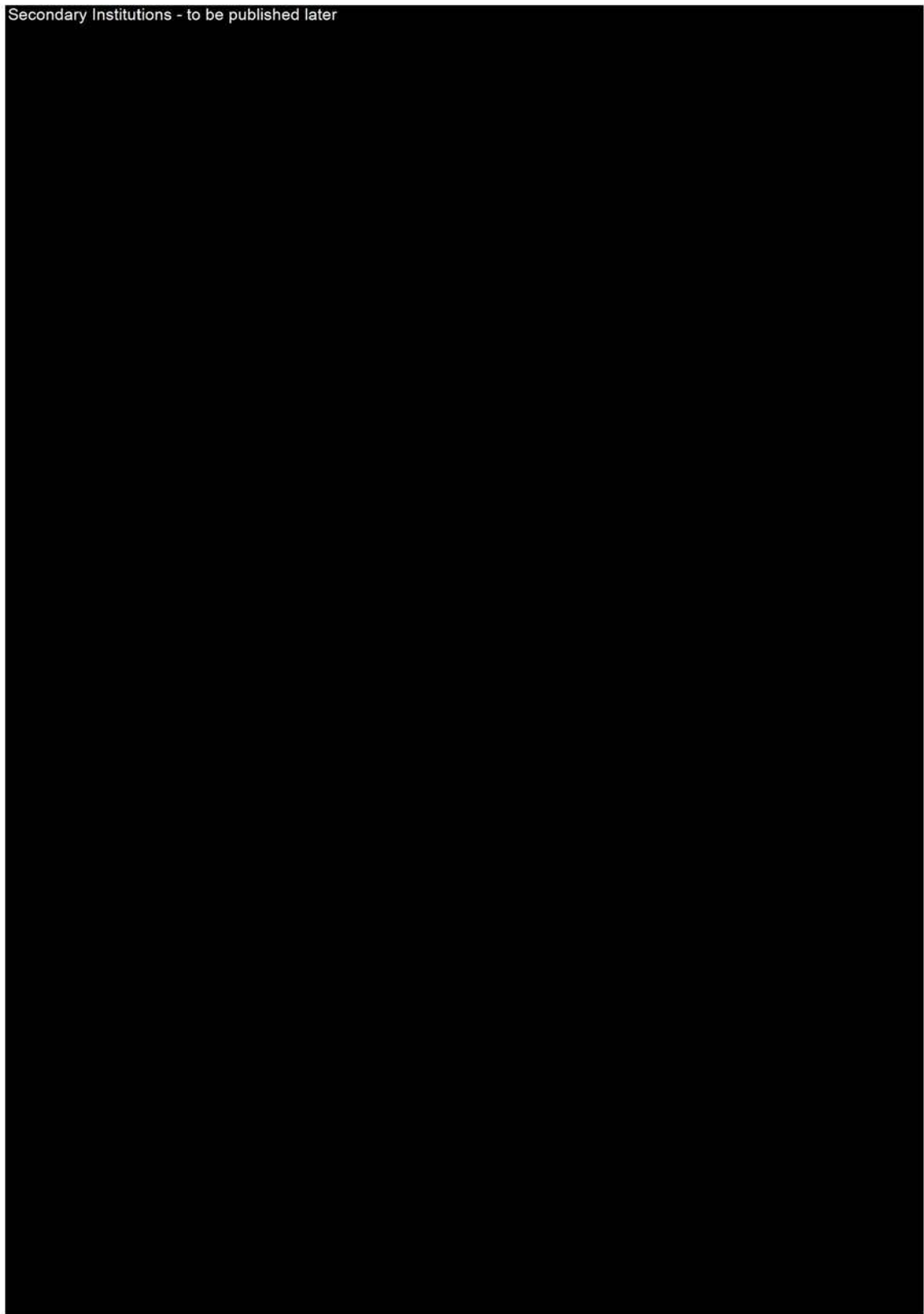
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Clark House Children's Home, Largs, Ayrshire

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Newfield Assessment Centre, Johnstone, Renfrewshire

81. I was first moved to Newfield in the middle of [REDACTED] 1982. I recall it being late at night. I arrived after ten o'clock at night. I was taken in a car by my social worker. During my first visit I was only there for three to four weeks. After Newfield I was sent to Camus before going back to Clark House. It didn't work out at Clark House. I was back in Newfield probably only two weeks after returning to Clark House.
82. Newfield was normally used as an assessment facility. Kids were assessed there to allow people to decide what to do with them. Some of the kids went on to other units and some went home. It was like a gladiator academy. It wasn't a nice place. There were a lot of fights between the kids. Feuds spilled over from the areas that

the kids had come from. The fighting was sometimes encouraged by the staff members in the unit.

School

83. Newfield had a school downstairs. That's the first time I remember struggling with my education. A lot of stuff I should have been able to do I couldn't do. It became more apparent because the classes only had four or five kids in them.

Activities at Newfield

84. Newfield had a longer term unit. When I was moved there I was given a bit more responsibility. I liked bikes and the place had a lot of bikes. A lot of the bikes were damaged and I put them together so that they were useable. I was given money to go to the shops to get the parts for the bikes. I was also given a chitty to allow me to go and use the local swimming pool.

Pocket money and treats

85. You got pocket money. Every penny was documented. There were treats that you could buy. You never physically got to spend the cash. You would sign for things and it would be deducted from your account.

Abuse at Newfield

86. There was one unit that was used for visitors. It had four or five rooms just with mattresses in them. The doors could be locked. I remember, on a couple of occasions, being physically manhandled by staff and put into these rooms. The door was locked and I was left overnight. The staff were heavy handed.

Fighting at Quarriers swimming pool

87. We once went down to Quarriers to use their swimming pool. A scrap broke out in the changing rooms. Four of us ended up fighting naked in the pool. The staff members dragged us out and took us back to Newfield.

Redheugh Adolescent Unit, Kilbirnie, North Ayrshire

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Leaving Redheugh

111. Secondary Institutions - to be published later I went to do a Steps to Independence course in Paisley. It was four weeks long. I did that just in case I didn't cut it in the army. In the end my time in care ended on a Friday with me having nowhere to stay until I joined the army on the following Tuesday.
112. When my care ended my social worker didn't even come to see me. I saw him about three weeks before and that was the last time I saw him. Redheugh awarded me £400 to get clothes to join the military. They made me aware that that was the equivalent of a week's time in care and that's why they provided that amount. That was it.
113. If it hadn't have been for the Stuart Burgess and his wife I don't know where I would have been. I stayed with them that weekend. They then took me to Glasgow Central for a train to go for basic training with the army on the Tuesday. It was Stuart and his wife who kept in contact to see how I was getting on. Nobody else kept in contact.

Opportunities for getting fostered

114. I was never fostered. At the time it was all local authority fostering. It was a bit of a hit or a miss. Nobody wanted a laddie who been in care since they were four years old. I remember, whilst I was in Redheugh, they sent a photographer to take pictures. Nothing ever happened. I also remember reading a comment in a report saying "reports too good to be true".
115. I know now, from being a social worker working in the industry, that placing teenage boys isn't the easiest thing in the world. This is especially so when you have a boy

who has been in care for eight or nine years. There was also something in the background with my dad stopping it happening. I was aware of that. He told us.

116. There was talk about me being placed with my younger sister [REDACTED] when she was fostered by the first couple who fostered her. However, that broke down when my sister left there. There was also talk of me going to be fostered with my older sister [REDACTED] at her foster placement. However, her foster mother became ill and didn't have the capacity to look after me.

Social workers

117. My initial social worker was called Michael Brannigan. He was the guy who took me down to Barrholm with my dad. I only recall seeing him once after that over the following years. I remember seeing him pop his head round the door to speak with one of the staff at Barrholm and that was about it. I don't know what happened to him.
118. My next social worker was called Mary Spence. She was a senior and was my social worker for a small time. I can't recall for how long. She was probably the first social worker I recall spending any time with. I couldn't tell you how many times I saw her but I recall seeing her regularly. She took an interest in me and took me out a couple of times.
119. My next social worker was called Brian Coyle. He was newly qualified. He was my social worker until I left care in 1986. He was introduced to me by Mary Spence. I used to see Brian quite a lot. In fact, I felt as if he was there all the time at one point. I ran away from Barrholm on a couple of occasions and he took me back. I can't remember why I ran away.

Life after being in care

The army

120. After Redheugh I spent six years in the military. I was in the [REDACTED] Guards as a tank crewman. I got a trade as a mechanic. I found it easy to go into basic training. It was actually easier being in basic training than some of the residential care I had been in. A guy shouting at me six inches away from my face didn't bother me. I enjoyed my time in the military. A lot of the guys I was with in basic training were either from broken homes or residential care.
121. I probably wouldn't have left the military if I wasn't engaged to someone who didn't want to become a military wife. I think that being in the military made it easier for me when I ultimately went into civvy life. If I had done that straight from leaving care I probably would have ended up in jail.
122. I can see now why so many people end up on the streets following the army. There is no support when you leave. I was fortunate because I had got married and my wife's family took me in when I left. I did that for six months so I could save a deposit to buy a house. I think, without that, I would have ended up like a lot of my pals on the streets.

Work as a mechanic

123. When I left the army I set up my own garage. I ended up working with my dad. My dad had a bus company at the time. I ended up buying half of that off of him. I worked with my dad for about ten years.

Becoming a social worker

124. I was a mechanic. I got arthritis in my spine from years of crawling under vehicles. I left working with my dad. I did work somewhere else but I wasn't enjoying it. I wasn't happy. I had a chat with the Stuart Burgess. I had kept in touch with him. We talked about a few things I could do. Stuart then said "have you ever fancied

social work?" It was something that I'd never thought about before. Stuart wrote the letter so as I could go back and get my education to get into social work. I didn't enjoy the college and university side of things but when I did my first placement I came back buzzing. That's when I knew that social work was for me.

Impact

125. I'm very guarded about my past. I don't let people know about it. Before I came to talk to the Inquiry I spoke with a colleague who is social worker. She is also a trained counsellor. She's called Liz. She's been fantastic. I had to build up to speak to the Inquiry. I needed to do some work with her to be able to speak about my past.

Mental Health

126. I don't trust people. I never have done. I question everybody. I've really struggled to trust people in my adult life. As a result I've already been divorced once. I'm very careful about my relationships. I don't have good attachments because of my time in care. I now know my deficiencies and I can work around them. A lot of the kids that I work with now don't know how to do that. I think we need to do a lot more work there.
127. My ex-wife said that I suffered from depression. I don't think that. If I feel crap I deal with it. I'll clear my head by going away and walking my dogs. I do get anxious and very nervous about things. I try not to show it on the outside. It's taken years of practice.

Personal items

128. You don't keep personal items on display when you are in care. That's because that was seen as a sign of weakness. If you left things out they would get stolen or destroyed anyway. I don't have any of my personal stuff on display in my own house to this day. I put it all away. Nothing of my stuff is ever on display and my kids notice that.

Records

129. I have my records. I made a subject access request in 2006 before I went into social work. There is nothing in my records from my time in Barrholm. There's a couple of reports from Clark House. There's something from Newfield. Most of the records are from Redheugh.
130. Stuart Burgess has sat me down and worked with me to try and piece together my past. I wanted to find out with him why I had been on this journey. I did that before I became a social worker. Secondary Institutions - to be published later
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131. I have discovered from my records and Stuart that I was accommodated under section 10 of the Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1958. My mum and dad had split up and my dad hadn't been paying maintenance. That's when my mother went to the DSS to try and get money. My mum then went to a lawyer. The lawyer's advice was to take us to my father's home in Paisley and call his bluff. The lawyer said that if she dropped off the kids then she would soon get her money and the kids back. That's when my dad contacted the social work department and put us into care. My father was quite stubborn in that way.
132. I saw in my records that there was collusion between the social work department and my father to accommodate us. They actually used the word 'collusion' in one of the reports. It was Michael Brannigan's signature on the report. The report concerned us being placed into care in Quarriers. They wouldn't accept us because they wanted to "separate the bad children from the good child". At four years old I was already labelled a 'bad child'. That's why we ended up in Barrholm.
133. When I look back on the information in my case files I realise that I didn't know what was going on. It is important to know your life story. Nobody told me whilst I was in

care what was going on. It was all done on the 'hush hush'. The reports talk about keeping things from me. I think that that was wrong. You need predictability and stability in your life.

Other information

Social work and care in the sixties and seventies

134. The Social Work (Scotland) Act came into force in 1968. That's when the whole Children's Hearing thing started to kick off. To me, looking back, I think that social work were trying to make a name for themselves. I think that, because of that, they got it wrong with so many of us.
135. Big group homes seemed to be the cheapest way to look after children. They would pile children into them. There were no standards back then. It was just a case of 'look after them'. As a child, there was nobody you could report things to. You would never see your social worker. There was nobody to raise things with.

Learning lessons in social work and fostering today

136. I don't think that social work have learnt their lessons. I see practices still happening today that happened to me when I was in care. We seem to regurgitate the same policies. They're policies that were there in the early seventies. The policies don't think about the children. I've tried to challenge these practices but have been accused of whistle blowing. I remember reporting a case where a senior manager was abusive towards a child. It was just a case of "they've worked here longer than you, they're more senior so never question them".
137. I've worked with trying to get foster placements for kids now. It's not a case of the local authorities getting the right placement for kids, it's a case of getting any placement. I think that is wrong. On our side of things, as social workers, we are

constantly turning placements down because they are wrong because of 'x, y and z' is needed for the child. As a social worker we read all the paperwork. We know that you have to get it right first time or the child just ends up being moved from one place to another. You end up taking away attachment figures from children. It's horrific.

Social work training

138. I think social work training today is pretty shit. I've seen new social workers come in and they don't know how to analyse information. When they write a report they'll plagiarise other peoples' reports to death. I had an instance where I was phoned up by a Children's Reporter and told that one of my cases were coming back at the end of the year. I didn't recognise the case. It turned out that another social worker had submitted my report and just changed the date on it. They hadn't even changed my name on it. I think that standards are low. I've seen some good practise but I've also seen work where I've wondered how the person is still doing the job.

My experience of care today whilst working as a social worker

139. I've visited places in my role as a social worker and seen practices that were happening thirty or forty years ago. I remember seeing at the Good Shepherd kids picking stuff up out of a big pile of clothes. Kids not getting their own clothes. This was happening in a modern unit today.
140. I've been in some units and seen some fantastic work getting done. Those units don't get praised at all. I've been to others places though, usually places run by local authorities, and they are still getting run like it was thirty or forty years ago. They haven't changed at all. They haven't moved forward. They aren't working with the children to help them understand their situation or discussing with them how to move forward. It seems to be a case of just containing the children and moving them on.

141. 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.

GGG

Signed

Dated

29/6/2017