

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

**Holly ALEX**

Support person present: No

1. My name is Holly Alex. My name as a child in care was Holly Hamilton. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1990. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Life before going into care**

2. I was born in Leith, Edinburgh. My mum was [REDACTED] and my step-dad was called [REDACTED]. I've always called him dad. We lived in what were known as the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] When I was eleven years old we moved out of the [REDACTED] to an area near Leith called Restalrig.

3. I had a good childhood. I spent a lot of time with my dad because my mum was always working. I grew up as a tomboy. I played football all the way through primary school and enjoyed going to the park and getting dirty. I went to St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School. When I was nine years old, a boy was picking on me at school. He tripped me up and my head went through a metal fence. After that, I went to Leith Primary School for about a year before I started high school. I went to Leith Academy. I got on fine in my first year of high school. I had friends from St Mary's and Leith Primary Schools. I joined the school football team. I loved school and still have friends from that time.

4. When I was twelve and a half years old, my parents split. I'm a daddy's girl and I didn't handle the split well at all. I was becoming a teenager which is a turbulent time, even if you don't have issues, and I went off the rails. I was running away from home. I started drinking and taking drugs. I didn't do what I was told and rebelled against my mum. I was friends with the bad, outcast kids and followed them about. Before that, I was the perfect pupil. [REDACTED]
5. My relationship with my mum was breaking down. She was having me routinely arrested by the police. My dad was in prison at this point and I was rarely going to school. Me and my mum had physical fights. It came to a head when I was thirteen years old in about January or February of 2004. It was the afternoon. I'd been drinking and my mum was saying something to me about my dad. I threatened to throw a bottle at her if she didn't stop. My mum twisted what I said. She locked herself in her bedroom, phoned the police and said I was trying to murder her.
6. Four police officers burst through the door. I was sitting on floor putting my make-up on. I was taken to the police station. The police told me my mum phoned them and said she didn't want me back. I was taken back to my mum's and all my stuff was put in black bin bags. The police didn't have a reason to hold me so I was dumped at a social work centre on Leith Walk. I sat on a chair in a corridor for four hours. I now know that was because the social workers were trying to figure out where I could go. Someone said they had found a children's home for me and I was going to stay there for a week.

#### **Drylaw Children's Home, Edinburgh**

7. I was thirteen years old when I first went in to care. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later

[REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

8.

### **Leaving Drylaw Children's Home**

9. I stayed at Drylaw for a week. I found out from one of the staff that my mum had said she didn't want me back at all. I didn't know where I was going to. I barricaded myself in my room because I didn't want to leave. I said I didn't want to be passed from pillar to post. I wanted to stay in one place. I ended up in Drylaw Police Station, in police custody for an hour or so, because there was nowhere for me to go. I was in a police cell with the door open. My gran said she would take me so I went to live with her.

### **Living with my gran, Leith, Edinburgh**

10. I went to live with my dad's mum, [REDACTED] I was absolutely fine going to stay with my gran. I'm still very close to my gran and I see her as much as I can. I stayed for two weeks. My grandad was suffering from dementia and my gran, trying to be everybody's saviour, decided to take on a teenager. It got to the point where she couldn't keep an eye on my grandad to stop him wandering off and keep an eye on me. My gran still apologises for that. My mum's parents said they would look after me. They were in England.

### **Living with my maternal grandparents, Berkshire, England**

11. I lived with my mum's parents, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] for two weeks. Then I ran away. They lived in Berkshire in a tiny, rural village. I usually spent the seven weeks of the summer holidays with them. I had never been close with my mum's mum and dad. They said I was going to live in Berkshire for ever and was being sent to private school. I thought, that's not happening. I had a fight with my grandad, stole some euros and ran away to get a train back to Scotland.
12. I walked about 45 minutes away, to get to the closest train station. My nana drove and found me. My nana said if I wanted to go back, she would phone social work and get me on the first plane she could. I was met at airport arrivals in Edinburgh by a couple of social workers. The police were outside, in a car, in case something kicked off. I ended up in a children's home for one night.

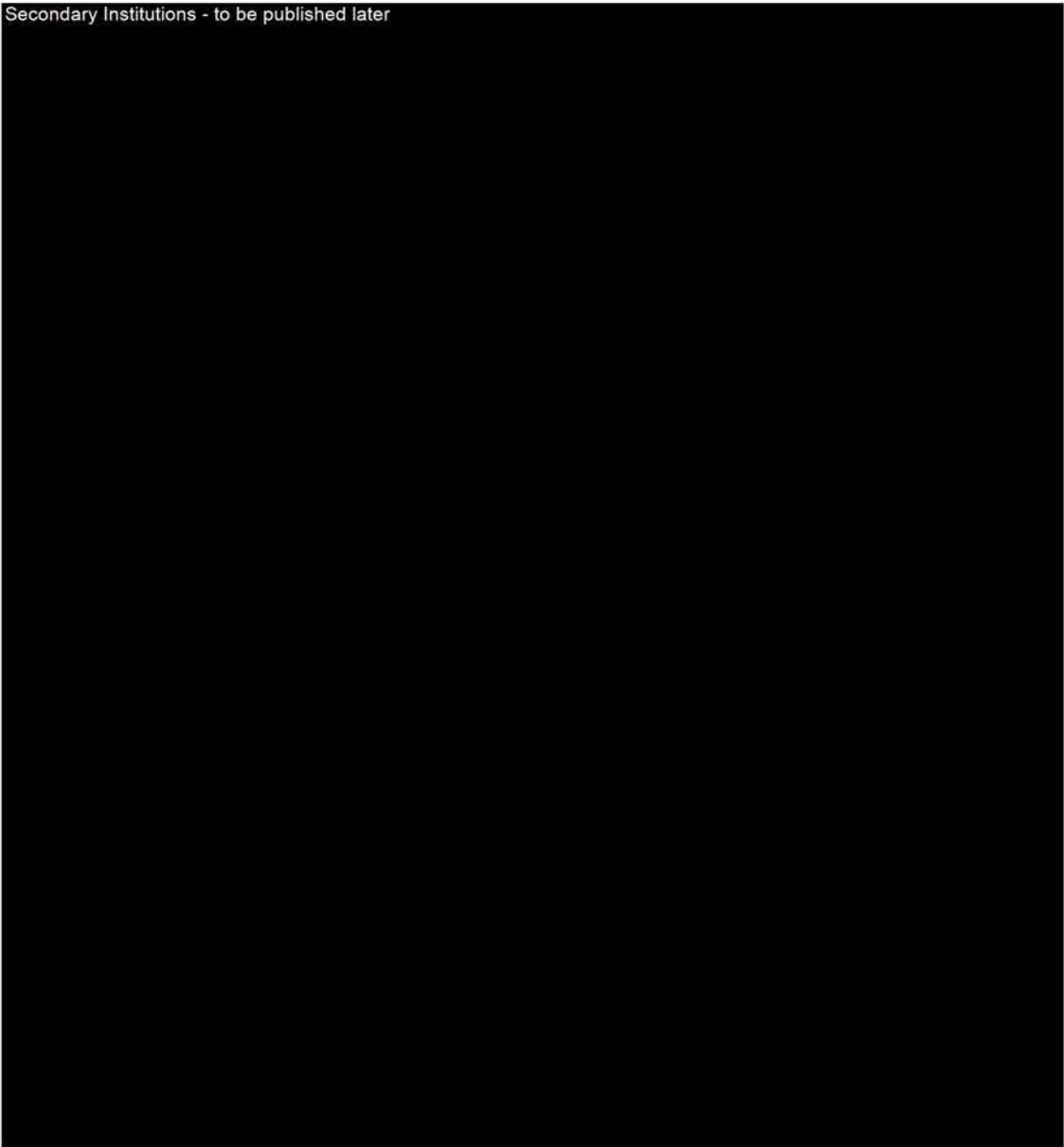
### **Ferniehill Young Person's Centre, Edinburgh**

13. I stayed at Ferniehill for one night, in an emergency bed. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later  
[REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later  
[REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later The  
next day I moved to Northfield Young Persons Centre.

### **Northfield Young Person's Centre, Edinburgh**

14. I moved to Northfield [REDACTED] 2005 when I was fourteen years old. It was about a month and half after my mum had phoned the police and I was taken into the police station. I stayed in Northfield for about nine months. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later  
[REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later  
[REDACTED]

15. Secondary Institutions - to be published later




16.

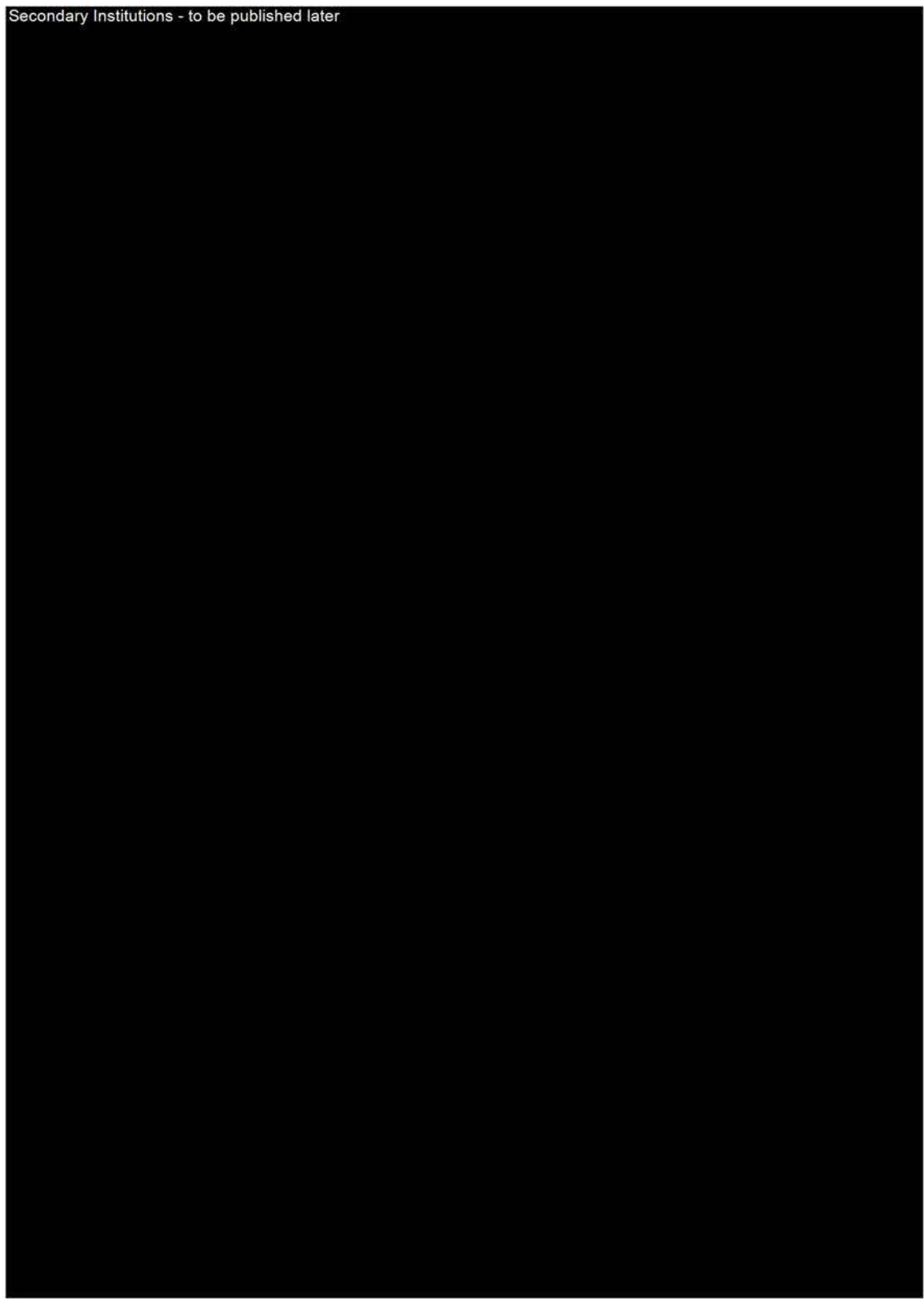
17.

18. My abuser in St Katherine's Secure Unit, Gordon Collins, worked at Northfield when I was there. He was assistant manager. Gordon was about 49 years old. I didn't see him a lot at Northfield but I know he worked there. The first time I saw him he played pool with us. He left Northfield shortly before I was sent to St Katherine's and started working in St Katherine's.

19. Secondary Institutions - to be published later



Secondary Institutions - to be published later



20.

21.

22.

23.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

24.

25.

26.

27.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

28.

29.

30.

31.

32.



Secondary Institutions - to be published later

33.

34.

35.

36.

37.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

38.

39.

40.

41.

42.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

43.

44.

45.

46.

47.

48.

49.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

50.

51.

52.

53.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

54.

55.

56.

57. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

58.

59.

### **St Katherine's Secure Unit, Edinburgh**

60. I went into St Katherine's Secure Unit around February 2006 when I was fifteen years old. I was ejected from secure shortly after my sixteenth birthday. St Katherine's was ten minutes up the road from Northfield and is a whole complex, with three buildings. The secure unit was a large, circular bungalow. The close support unit was a large house and beside it was another large house which was the open unit.
61. When you came into St Katherine's past reception, there was a corridor with the laundry room and Room 7 which was a cell for a young person who's been segregated or supervised. You came through a door and, almost in a circle, there was an office,

attached to the office was the living-room and attached to the living-room was a games room. There was the door to the bedrooms and a little resident's kitchen. There was a big dining-room and the big kitchen for preparing the meals. The bedrooms were up a long corridor. The building went round in a circle and, in the middle, there was a courtyard.

62. When I arrived, there were six children in the secure unit. There were boys and girls. My friend [REDACTED] from Northfield, was in there. He had gone a couple of months before me. I still speak to four of the young people who were in secure when I was. There was a turnover of three different groups of kids while I was in secure, other than me and a couple of other people.

*Staff at St Katherine's Secure Unit*

63. There were a lot of staff at the secure unit. The manager was Peter McCluskey. The assistant manager was Joyce Tant. The staff I remember are Keith McCulloch, Graeme Russell, Peggy White, Beth, Shereen, [REDACTED] IMC [REDACTED] Gordon Collins and [REDACTED] INA [REDACTED] was a massive, chubby guy with long white hair in a ponytail. He was really nice. About six staff were on duty at any one time.
64. The staff were fine. For the majority of the staff, it seemed like the kind of job they wanted to do. They engaged with the young people [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later The staff would spend time with the young people, even if it was just watching TV. One of the staff taught me how to make omelettes and [REDACTED] IMC [REDACTED] put braids in my hair. I got [REDACTED] INA [REDACTED] to wash his hair. I cut his ponytail then dried and straightened his hair. I wanted to get my hands on his hair and he didn't object.

## **Routine at St Katherine's Secure Unit**

### *First Day*

65. The police rang the buzzer on the door. I got out of the car and had another cigarette. A member of the secure staff came out and said I couldn't smoke there. I said I was going to be locked up for however long and wasn't committing a crime by smoking before I went in. They didn't say much to me after that. Joanne came into reception and after that I was on my own with the secure staff.
66. I was taken to a little room down a corridor. Everywhere we went, the staff had to use a fob. The staff asked if I had anything on me that I shouldn't have. I handed over my phone and tried to hide my cigarettes and lighter. The staff had seen me smoking outside the building so that didn't work. In the room I was searched for anything else that I might have had by a female member of staff. It was the sort of pat down search you would get at the airport. I filled in some paperwork and was told what was happening. The staff said they would take my belongings and search them. I had to earn getting some of my belongings back.
67. I was held by the arm, by two members of staff, and a third member of staff used the fob to go into the bedroom corridor. There was no need for them to hold me. Where was I going to run to? I wasn't a danger to the staff. I'd walked in willingly. I hadn't tried to run away or acted aggressively.
68. I was shown to my room which was completely bare. It was called a room but it was a cell. There was a blue concrete block with a thin mattress on the top. The mattress was blue with a waterproof coating on it. It didn't have a pillow or a duvet. A table was attached to the wall. The blinds were built into the windows. There was a button you pressed if you wanted the blind opened. The door was a cell door. I said to staff it was a cell and they said, what did I expect?



69. I was left in the room for about four hours, sitting in silence. Someone brought me dinner, on a plastic plate. I was told that once I'd finished my dinner, I was allowed to come out, meet everybody and watch TV.

*Mornings and Bedtime*

70. Lights up was at 8:00 am. You could not get out of your room because you were locked in. The lights were turned on by the office and someone came down the corridor. They shouted it was time to get up. A member of staff was assigned to each room. There was a cupboard outside the room and all my clothes, toiletries and possessions were in there. You came out of the room and went to the cupboard to get toiletries and your clothes that you were wearing that day.
71. You went back to your room to get ready and you were locked in. You buzzed when you were ready. Everybody had to be ready before we could move. Everybody was let out of their rooms at the same time to go for breakfast. A member of staff accompanied you to the dining-room. You went to school from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm.

*Mealtimes*

72. In the dining-room, you were assigned where you sat and a member of staff sat at every table. Breakfast was served from the kitchen on a trolley. At the weekends you got fry-up food. During the week you got toast and cereal. At lunchtime you went back into the residential unit from school and got your lunch in the dining-room. Everyone had to eat at the same time. The food was from the 3663 company and was the same as Northfield.
73. Most of us came from an environment where food was an afterthought. Nine times out of ten, when you go into secure you are going to get fat because you are having to sit down and eat meals.

### *Washing and bathing*

74. The only difference from the room in the secure to a police cell, was that the room had an en-suite toilet. The en-suite had a sliding door that the staff could control. Sometimes they would lock your bathroom so that you couldn't use it. The staff did that to me because I developed an eating disorder in secure.

### *Leisure time*

75. After school, you had some free time. You could go to your room or watch TV in the living room. You could sit in the dining room and ask for paper and pens to do some writing or drawing. There were books and board games.

### *Schooling*

76. The school was in the facility and everybody went. We had polo shirts that we had to wear when we were going to school. You weren't encouraged to go to education, it was just if you didn't go you'd be locked up all day in your room, in silence. It wasn't all six young people in one class. For example, three of us would have maths and three have English, in separate rooms. The teachers taught full-time from Monday to Friday. There were about five teachers plus the headteacher. If we had a fifteen minute break, we could go out in the courtyard. A few members of staff would be there.
77. We couldn't do all our standard grades. Most people in secure only come away with three standard grades, if they do them. We got maths, English, science, art, gym, music and computing. I had done maths, English and computing at Panmure and I sat my standard grades in those subjects in secure. I just passed maths, I got a General in English and an Intermediate 1 in computing. There was more variety of lessons in secure but the level of teaching was the same as at Panmure. We didn't get homework. I enjoyed school in secure.

### *Healthcare*

78. The staff were really good about healthcare, especially when I first went in and was having withdrawals from alcohol. They were really quick in getting me seen by the doctor. The withdrawals were so severe that I was at high risk of going into a seizure. Keith McCulloch recognised the withdrawal symptoms. I had to be prescribed diazepam and went to the office three times a day to be given it.
79. When you were first taken in you went for a full health check-up and were seen by a nurse. If there was a health issue, you could tell the staff and they would get you seen by a doctor. I had root canal treatment while I was in secure.

### *Bulimia / Self-harming*

80. I ended up with bulimia for a while in secure. I didn't like that I was putting on so much weight. I wasn't used to that volume of food and it was hurting my stomach. I was always a small, skinny girl. I started making myself sick once I started putting weight on so the staff didn't let me go to the toilet, after every meal. If I was allowed to go to my room, they locked the door to the toilet for the first hour after every meal. There was no specialist help or counselling.
81. I was still self-harming. Staff bandaged you up or, if it was not that bad, they gave you the stuff to clean yourself up.

### *Christmas and birthdays*

82. I was in care for most of my teenage Christmas and birthdays and I've blocked them out. One year, I was the only person in secure for Christmas. Everyone else got home for Christmas.

*Visitors/Inspections/Review of detention*

83. I briefly had contact with my social worker when I first went into secure. Then she had her baby and went on maternity leave. I had a brief, temporary social worker called Benjamin. I don't remember many conversations with him. Then I got a woman called Bernadette who was my social worker until I left St Katherine's.
84. When I left Northfield and went to secure, there were review meetings at the children's panel every three weeks. After the first three weeks, I went to the meeting and thought I was getting home to Northfield. Northfield said they couldn't take me back because eight hours after I left, they painted my room and moved a new young person in. I said just to give me the full six months in secure because I had nowhere to go.
85. There were two panel meetings in the time I was in secure. Every six months there were care reviews that were held in the conference room in the secure unit. Everybody sat around the table, talking about me. I said some things. Most meetings I was talking about trying to get access to my brothers through the courts. My mum had completely abandoned me. She moved away and didn't tell anyone where she was.
86. Social work were investigating getting an order that would mean social work were my parents and my mum would not have parental rights. Social work got temporary responsibility for me but not parental rights. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

*Discipline*

87. If you refused to come out of your room for school or any other reason, the staff took away your mattress, pillow and duvet. If you had a CD player or a TV in your room, they took that and you had to earn it back. You got your mattress back at night but I remember a couple of nights when I didn't have a pillow.

### *Physical Restraint*

88. One of the big things in secure was that I saw a lot of young people restrained. There was a normality to it. Young people were restrained if they were shouting, chucking things, trying to smash something or trying to hit a member of staff. The staff had an alarm on their belt so, if a restraint needed to happen, a staff member would press the alarm. That sent an alarm to secure, closed support and open and staff came from all the units.
89. I never had to have it done to me because I knew the limits. I would ask to be taken to my room if I felt it was going to get to that stage. I knew if the staff restrained me then I would fight back. I don't like been touched or grabbed.
90. I know there are proper control and restraint techniques because I worked as a door steward later. I think the kind of manoeuvres used in secure are excessive for a small, young person, in that kind of setting. I could see how the young person could get hurt, with the amount of people holding them down on the ground. I witnessed restraint in the communal area about four times but restraint also happened in other areas in the unit.
91. There was one occasion in the dining-room where the restraint seemed excessive. The young person being restrained was only a small girl. Four or five members of staff, male and female, restrained her.

### **Abuse at St Katherine's Secure Unit**

92. Gordon Collins was fifty years old when the abuse started. All of the abuse happened when I was fifteen years old. It happened every weekend for six months. Gordon had been working at the secure unit for a month or so before I was moved to secure and only worked weekends. He was either a carer or a senior carer. I first saw him when I had been in secure for a couple of weeks.

93. For the first four or four and half months of all this happening, I thought I was in a relationship with Gordon. It seemed like a relationship. I had feelings for him and he said he had feelings for me. It was in the last month and a half that I realised it wasn't a relationship, that what he was doing to me was scaring me and it wasn't right.
94. When I first realised Gordon was working at secure, I was sitting at the dining-room table when Gordon came in with the biggest grin on his face. He must have been aware that I was there because he came straight over to me and gave me a big cuddle. I thought it was great that there was a member of staff at secure who I knew and got on with. It escalated from there.
95. Gordon would take charge and offer to take me anywhere I had to go within the facility, like when I was doing laundry and if I wanted to go to my room or to the gym. There was no specific person who took you from place to place, it was whoever was available. Gordon made himself available. You had to ring a buzzer to get out of your room and it lit up on a big board in the office. If Gordon was on shift, nine times out of ten, he would answer my buzzer.
96. Every time Gordon saw me, he cuddled me. It progressed to him pushing me up against walls, kissing me, kissing my neck and biting my neck. Gordon pushed his body right into me and was grinding on me. There was the emotional side of it too because he knew my history. Gordon said he knew I'd had a hard life, that my mum didn't want me and my dad was in prison but that he loved and cared for me. He said he wasn't happy with his wife. Gordon told me we couldn't say any of this to anybody because nobody would understand what we had.
97. A couple of months after this, Gordon began to put his hands up or down my top. Then he began putting his hands down my bottom half and putting his fingers inside me. A lot of the stuff happened in my bedroom. It also happened in the bedroom corridor, the education corridor and the school gym. On one occasion, Gordon touched me when other people were around. One weekend the home hired a huge bouncy castle with a slide. Gordon went down first and I went down after him. He didn't move from the

bottom and I ended up on top of him in a pile. Gordon groped my top and bottom half. There were lots of people around and I was very anxious that people would see. I don't know if Gordon was getting brave or just chancing his luck.

98. When the touching started to happen, on the one hand I thought he was doing it because he liked me. On the other hand, I was getting anxious and scared and I wasn't enjoying it. It changed from me thinking that I loved Gordon, he loves and cares for me and I won't tell anybody because they won't understand, to thinking it didn't feel right. I said to Gordon that it couldn't go on anymore and he was too old. I told him it wasn't right. He cried and said he didn't want to lose me, his wife didn't give him attention and I meant everything to him.

### **Reporting of abuse at St Katherine's Secure Unit**

99. Some young people from the unit and me were treated to a residential week stay at Benmore because we had been at the unit for a long time. A few days before we left, Gordon said he was really going to miss me because I was going away and he was going on annual leave, so he wasn't going to see me for a while.
100. We went to Benmore. Two girls, who I'm still friendly with now, read my diary. I had written the emotional stuff about Gordon in the diary, rather than the physical stuff. The two girls reported it to the staff who were at Benmore. The girls never told me that they had reported it. They still apologise for doing that.
101. A couple of days after I got back from Benmore, a member of staff said I had to go to the manager's office. You don't go to the manager's office unless someone's died or something. I had no clue what was going on. I went to the office. Peter and Joyce were there. Peter didn't even know Gordon's name, he asked me who Colin Gordon was. The assistant manager had to correct him. I broke down and became really upset. I wouldn't talk to them about it.



102. I said I had written some stuff in a diary and they asked for it. I didn't know if I wanted to give them the diary because it had loads of other, personal stuff in it so I gave them pages from my diary. I was adamant that I didn't want to get Gordon into trouble, for him to lose his job or for his wife and a child to find out. I felt like I was doing something wrong. I didn't tell the managers or any of the members of staff what had actually happened with Gordon.
103. A policeman and policewoman came to speak to me the next day but I didn't speak to them. They came a second time a few days later and I spoke to them a little bit. I told the police little bits that were in my diary but I never told them everything. I said Gordon had bitten my neck and groped my bum and stuff. The police took my diary pages. The police told me it was my word against his and nothing was taken forward. They thought it was a one-off allegation.
104. From then on, it was like every member of staff in the secure unit became fearful of me and didn't believe me. I was assigned two care workers at all times. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere in the building without two members of staff. The staff were fearful that they would be accused next, even the female staff. I was told by male and female members of staff that they didn't believe me. One care worker said to me, "You do know, lies like that can destroy people's lives." I don't remember the worker's name but they were tall and had short hair. To the staff, I was accusing a colleague of abusing me. The staff didn't know the full details because I hadn't told them and the police didn't know either.
105. When the staff said they didn't believe me, I sneaked a [REDACTED] out of my cupboard when a member of staff was standing with me but not looking. I cut myself badly and wrote on the walls, [REDACTED] that nobody believed me. When the staff saw that, they said I had to clean it from the walls once they'd bandaged me up. I cleaned it with wet toilet paper.
106. There was one member of staff who I could speak to, who ended up being my key worker. His name was Graham Russell. Graham did his job right and by the book. We got on really well. I never talked about Gordon with him. Graham never straight out



said he believed me but he did say to other staff that he had no issue working with me on his own. In my social work files, Graham reported that I asked him, "why was it always me?"

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institu

107. At this point, Gordon was still on annual leave. I was told by a female staff member Gordon was suspended pending investigation. I've found recently, from my lawyers in my civil case, that Gordon actually resigned before he could be suspended. The last time I saw him in a residential setting was the day he said he would miss me because he was going on annual leave.

### **Leaving St Katherine's Secure Unit**

108. If you didn't pose a high risk to yourself or anybody else, then you were allowed to move to close support. I was moved within a couple of weeks. I was told it was a good time for me to move on. I think I got moved because the staff wanted to get rid of me because of what had gone on. I don't think the staff felt comfortable with me being in the unit anymore. I was in no way ready to leave secure when they moved me.

### **St Katherine's Close Support Unit**

109. In the close support unit, your room is a proper bedroom. You don't have to have meals at a certain time. If you want to have breakfast or dinner later, that's fine and the staff will keep food back for you.
110. You were allowed two, fifteen minute, time-outs to be by yourself. That was usually for a cigarette. Although the staff said we weren't allowed to smoke, they knew we did and we were allowed to go out for a cigarette or around to the corner shop. If you attended college or a course you were allowed to go out for that by yourself.

111. I was in the close support unit for a couple of months. I can't tell you how often I was actually in the building because I went off the rails. I went missing for weeks on end. I had got clean in secure. As soon as I got out of secure, because of everything that had happened, I went straight back to dealing with my problems the way I had for years. I took it one step further with heroin.
112. A girl I had been in Northfield with, had left care and was living with her boyfriend in one of the undesirable areas of Edinburgh. I stayed with her, her boyfriend and his friend in a high-rise flat for two and half weeks. I became addicted to heroin and started drinking again. There was an amber police alert out for me and I was seen in the street by an off duty member of staff. I was out of my face. The staff tried to get me to go in their car but I ran away. I ended up going back to the unit that night.
113. For a couple of days, the staff made me sit in my room and a member of staff sat outside all day, to make sure I wouldn't leave the room. I was suffering badly with withdrawals from heroin and drink. I chucked a mug at a staff member's head and I ran out of the unit later that day.

#### **Leaving St Katherine's Close Support Unit**

114. The staff were at a loss as to what to do with me and were trying to move me through the units as quickly as they could. I was moved to the open unit.

#### **St Katherine's Open Unit – The Alison Unit**

115. I moved to the open unit when I was sixteen and a half years old and left when I was seventeen in 2007. The open unit was independent living with staff there. I was still addicted to heroin and drinking. I went out for days on end drinking and taking drugs. The only difference to the close support unit was that the staff taught me how to budget my money to buy food. I got £35 every week from social work. I had to buy and make my own food from that.

116. I was basically sitting in the unit until I got offered a house by the council. I vaguely remember a discussion about going back to the secure unit but someone said I was too old for it. The staff in the open unit tried with me. I don't have bad word to say about them. They tried to support me as much as they could. I was too far gone with everything for that to work. There wasn't specialist support about my drinking or using drugs. The staff spoke to me about it and asked me why I was doing it.

### **Leaving St Katherine's Open Unit – The Alison Unit**

117. I got a studio flat fifteen minutes away from the care home, through a company called Link Living. I was assigned a support worker, Susan, who helped me with food shopping and furnishing the house. I got a leaving care grant of £1500 from social work, to get a bed, a washing machine and other things for the flat. The Alison Unit always said I was more than welcome to go and stay there a couple of nights a week and come for dinner.

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


118. When I left care, I got money from Throughcare Aftercare, the social work, because I wasn't old enough to go to the Job Centre. I was meant to see my support worker every week. Sometimes I didn't see her for a couple of weeks, depending on what state I was in. I thought it was okay living in a flat on my own.
119. Shortly after my eighteenth birthday, I ended up in hospital. When I got home, I went cold turkey from everything. In hindsight it wasn't the best idea because I could have done so much damage to myself. I tried to eat properly. I didn't have any specialist counselling. I got a bar job and saved up all the money I earned. Shortly after my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, I had £2000 saved. I packed a bag, took the money and asked a friend in Glasgow if I could live with him until I got on my feet. I left Edinburgh.

120. I stayed in Glasgow for a couple of months. Then I was offered a council house in Hamilton. I lived there four years until all the abuse stuff resurfaced. I did a short stint as a Personal Assistant for a publishing company. I did care work in a care home for old people and for people in their homes. I worked in a nightclub. I started off doing public relations part-time. I gave up care work and worked up to being bar staff and got a door licence to help out on the door. I was bar manager before I got ill in 2015.

### **Impact**

121. All of this, ten years on, has completely turned my life upside down. Secondary Institutions - to

Secondary Institutions - to be published later



122. Looking back now, I think I was so naïve. That still bothers me. Gordon was so embedded in my head. I'd kissed a few boys and fooled around but I hadn't been in a proper relationship. I'd been in care for a couple of years at the point Gordon started abusing me. The sad thing is, to have an adult telling you they love you when I hadn't had anybody saying they loved me for a very long time, meant I thought it was real. I'm kind of lucky the abuse was discovered when it was and didn't get more serious.
123. I spent the ages of seventeen to eighteen in a drink and drug fuelled haze. I became anorexic and cut off my friends and family. When I ended up in hospital, I weighed five stones and my organs were failing. The doctors said if I carried on the way I was going, I wouldn't see my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I spent so many of my younger years doing things that would kill me but when I was faced with the possibility that I might die, I didn't want that to happen. I'm sober and clean and have been for eleven years.

124. Before I spoke to the police in 2014, I had a bit of anxiety about little things but nothing that impacted on my life. I had one panic attack when I was nineteen. I had a fiancé. When the police spoke to me and the case against Gordon was re-investigated, it was like Pandora's Box had been opened. I had severe anxiety and regular panic attacks, several times a week. I had image flashes of things I didn't understand, like a wall with a painting or a doorway. I lost my fiancé, my job and my flat. It wasn't a fun time.
125. I slowly got worse. My sleep was bad. In October 2015, I had the worst panic attack I'd ever had. My whole body went numb. I felt like I was floating on the ceiling and my heart was pounding out of my chest. I phoned an ambulance and went to hospital. I had a very high heart rate. I had a viral infection and was dehydrated which was contributing to my high heart rate but the anxiety was making it worse.
126. When I came out of hospital, I saw my general practitioner (GP). He gave me a prescription for medication. I took it for a couple of nights and didn't feel like it was helping. My GP pushed to get me a psychiatric and psychological assessment. He was good at that. My psychiatrist pushed hard medication on to me. I took it but it made me feel more crazy. I stopped taking it after a few months.
127. From that day, I've not been the same. I've had psychosis. I have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and disassociation. Some of the disassociation has gone away over the years but I still have derealisation. Derealisation makes everything seem like a dream and your environment doesn't feel real. I can get to sleep but I don't stay asleep. I don't leave the house by myself and barely leave the house even if I'm with somebody. I have daily flashbacks about Gordon and dream about what happened. It's very much still there, most days. I hear noises. I have anxiety and depression. The panic attacks have calmed down a bit. That's been my life for five years.
128. I don't trust anybody. In my head, everybody has the potential to hurt me, especially when it comes to men. If a man is being nice to me or showing any kind of affection, I automatically go to thinking, what do they want from me? I lost my fiancé because of



that. I tried to have a relationship with a friend and I just can't. I get flashbacks when I'm being intimate and that makes having an intimate relationship really difficult.

129. In January 2016 one of my old friends from Edinburgh came to visit me. When they saw me, they thought I had got unhealthily thin. My friend said to pack a bag and go to stay with him for a while. I stayed in Edinburgh until October 2016. I saw someone at the mental health hospital in Edinburgh for a bit. I moved to Falkirk in February 2017 and have regular psychological therapy, every fortnight. I'm working through the initial trauma very slowly.

130. The only family member I have a lot to do with is my gran. I speak to my dad occasionally. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### **Reporting of Abuse**

131. The police approached me in 2014 and said they were launching an investigation. The girl who was abused in 1996 was the catalyst. She approached the police in 2011 about what had gone on. It took them three years to look for other victims. I hadn't told anybody what had happened. The secure unit hadn't made my gran or my dad aware of the allegations. The police couldn't find me and turned up at my dad's door looking for me. The police wouldn't tell my dad anything. My dad phoned me and I had to tell him.

132. When the police phoned me and said they wanted to speak to me about Gordon Collins, I had a massive panic attack. I knew his name and I knew something had happened with him but I couldn't tell you a single thing that had happened to me. I was at work as a live-in carer, in an elderly client's private home. A policeman and a policewoman called Anita Dow turned up at the house, forty minutes after the phone call. They drove all the way from Edinburgh to Carlisle. My client had dementia and didn't really know what was going on.

133. The police wanted to go over my diary and my previous statement because they were going after Gordon. They did that in my client's home. I told them that what was in my diary was correct. I couldn't tell them anything else because I couldn't remember anything.
134. The police were very thorough. They spoke to over one hundred young women who had been in the care system, in the homes that Gordon had worked in. Anita was great and kept me in the loop with everything. She even sent me a goodbye email when she left the police.

### **Criminal Prosecution**

135. The police kept in contact with me and told me they were arresting Gordon in November. From the identification parade in December 2014 right through to trial was the worst time in my life, mental health wise. The run up to the court case was pretty much all of 2015. Gordon pled not guilty. The trial date was set for April 2016. Anita was my Liaison Officer through the whole thing.
136. I went to the identification parade in December. People were shown on a screen and Gordon's lawyer was there. I pointed Gordon out on the screen. It was the first time I had seen him in ten years. It was horrendous. One of my best friends was sitting in the witness room. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later [REDACTED] I had no idea Gordon abused her as well. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to [REDACTED] when she was being abused by Gordon. We are still friends but she doesn't talk about it much.
137. The trial was at Edinburgh High Court in April 2016. There were four girls who gave evidence in court. Gordon had started abusing girls from when he started at Northfield. The girl who was abused in 1996 was ten years older than me. In the court transcripts, it says [REDACTED] was abused between 2004 and 2005. Gordon went from [REDACTED] to me as soon as he moved to secure.

138. At court, I was supported by Anita and Jan, one of the care workers that had been in the Alison Unit when I was there. I still had a good relationship with the staff there and stayed over at the unit the night before I gave evidence. They asked if I would like to stay and gave me dinner and breakfast. It was nice to have the unit's support. I had in my head that the whole institution hated me. In court I had a Witness Support person sitting with me. I didn't want a screen.
139. My diary was the key evidence in Gordon being sentenced. Gordon was found guilty on my charge, which was lewd and libidinous behaviour under the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995, section 6. A couple of other charges concerning other girls were found not proven. Gordon was sentenced to six years imprisonment. The Crown felt that wasn't a suitable punishment. His sentence was later increased to ten years. My experience of court was that the court did what it needed to do.

### **Significant Case Review**

140. There was a Significant Case Review into my abuse and another girl's abuse. It was carried out by Stella Perot and Andrew Gillies. Andrew Gillies works for the council. The inquiry came up with seven failings of the council. For example, the review report says Gordon was not police checked until five months into his employment and there were risks from other transgressions, which meant he should never have been kept in employment by the council. I hold the council partly responsible for what happened to me because they never did their job right. That gets me really angry.

### **Civil Action**

141. I applied for Criminal Injuries Compensation and a lawyer told me about taking a civil action against Edinburgh City Council. I have done that. A court date has been set for May and the amended pleadings have to be in for December. The council are denying some of the things in the summons from my lawyer, even though those things were in



the transcript of the criminal case. I hope the Council don't take it to trial and they settle out of court. I won't be given Criminal Injuries Compensation until the civil case ends.

## **Records**

142. I got access to my social work records in the run up to the court case. I did a subject access request through the council. There were three boxes of records. A lot of stuff is redacted. The records were sent to my old social worker, Bernadette. Bernadette sat with me for a day and we sorted through it all. I realised there were things that were not documented or deleted. Going through the records, I felt sad. There were some things that I remembered clearly and some things that I only remembered when I read them. My lawyer has my records now.

## **Lessons to be learned**


143. Staff have an inability to believe that their colleagues are capable of abusing young people. Anyone is capable of abusing a young person. If a young person is saying that a member of staff has abused them, why does it automatically go to the young person lying? Staff should do their jobs properly, especially with something as serious as sexual abuse allegations. I hope that proper police checks are carried out on staff and that staff have some level of qualification in looking after young people.
144. The way young people who make allegations are handled has to be different. If a young person says they are being abused, they should be believed. If in time, investigations prove it is not true that is fair enough. I wasn't allowed to talk to anyone about it, members of staff were saying they didn't believe me and didn't want to be alone with me in case I accused them. You can't do that to a young person. I don't think staff understood the impact that has on a young person.
145. I read the complaints policy for Edinburgh City Council. It doesn't even mention that, if it's serious misconduct, the police should be involved. It all seems to be about

keeping complaints internal. If there is something serious, that needs to be shared with other parties and needs to be police matter.

146. Worker's ability to not see abuse in another light has to be tackled. People are taught that a person being abused will be a clear cut victim. I didn't know I was being abused until later on because abuse can be like the boyfriend model. The abuser manipulates the young person into thinking they are a couple, so a young person won't want to get the abuser in trouble or will think they will get into trouble. In-depth and careful trauma informed questioning by someone with relevant training needs to be available.

**Other information**

147. I don't know what powers the Inquiry has but I want changes and for more safeguarding and procedures to be put in place. There needs to be better support in place for young people.
148. I want the people who didn't do their jobs right in 1996 and 2001, whoever was involved in those internal investigations, to answer for that.
149. 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.....11 August 2021.....