

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Nuala HALLER

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is Nuala Haller. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1953. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

[REDACTED]

2. I grew up in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I stayed with my mother, father, brothers and sisters. I am the second youngest in the family. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We were a Catholic family although I wouldn't say a typical one.
3. My father was employed as a bookmaker. Unfortunately he was also a compulsive gambler. My mother didn't work. She was a full time mother.
4. My father's brother was a priest. Because of this we were seen as insiders to the Catholic church. My mother was from a relatively wealthy family. Her only contact with nuns was when she was at boarding school for a short time. She had no experience of nuns coming to the door. My mother felt threatened that the Catholic church would take [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] into care because she didn't keep up her Catholic duties. My mother promptly sent [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] down south so the church couldn't get their hands on them.

5. When [REDACTED] PFZ was sixteen and leaving school she said that she wanted to be a nun. [REDACTED] asked that the nuns give her a year so that she could work and then make her mind up. The nuns never left her alone. They would even visit her at her work. PFZ would also go to see the nuns on a Saturday and Sunday. [REDACTED] believed that they had brain washed her until she agreed to become a nun. This was the end for [REDACTED]. After this she just never liked nuns.
6. When I was young I adored PFZ. I had trouble reading and writing and PFZ would help me with this. I would have been about seven or eight years old when PFZ left to become a nun. I remember crying and begging her not to go. We never knew when we would see PFZ again. All I knew was that she was going to the south of Ireland.
7. The first time PFZ [REDACTED] was about five or six years after she had left. She had no clue as to how to relate to me or anyone else. I also didn't know how to relate to her. I was thirteen and PFZ still wanted to play with me. She still acted young and immature. PFZ had moved from the convent in the south of Ireland to London after about four years. She said the regime was too tough there. My mum always said that the young nuns were uneducated girls.
8. We were all glad when PFZ left to go back to the convent. We used to write letters to PFZ. She told us that these were always read by the other nuns before she would be given them. My mother told us that we could only put nice things in the letter.
9. When I went to secondary school, which was run by the Daughters of Charity, my mother took me there on the first day. I was eleven years old. My mum told the nuns that although they had [REDACTED] they wouldn't get me. After this the nuns never bothered me about becoming a nun.
10. At the various Daughters of Charity convents the nuns would go to a retreat for three weeks in the summer. After this they would go on holiday. The girls at the schools who were aged fifteen or sixteen would go to the convents to do paid work in place of the nuns. We were called relief workers.

11. When I was at school I always said that I wanted to work with children with special needs. PFZ knew another nun, Sister Stephen, who worked at St Josephs at Rosewell in Edinburgh, Scotland. PFZ said I could go there and work with the kids.
12. I was supposed to go to St Josephs in July 1968 but my mother had cancer. I wanted to stay and look after her. My mother insisted that she wanted me to go to. She wanted to see that I was working. After this I ended up going.
13. I went to St Josephs for the month of July. Although I wanted to work with children I was put on a ward with grown men. There wasn't a nun to be seen anywhere. I really loved working there.
14. About halfway through July PFZ arrived at St Josephs. I had been watching TV with the other girls when a nun appeared at the door. The room emptied and I realised it was PFZ. I asked why she was there. PFZ said it was because [REDACTED] was dying. I told her I knew this as I had been looking after her.
15. PFZ informed me that she was now working at Smyllum Orphanage. The nuns there had decided that she could go and visit my mother. She was to pick me up and we would fly [REDACTED] to see her. This was supposed to be a treat as my mother didn't know this was happening. I knew that my mother wouldn't be happy with this as her wish was for me to be working.
16. I ended up driving back to Smyllum with PFZ. There were three other nuns in the car, one of which was driving. I didn't know any of them. This was a Friday and we were to fly back to Belfast on the Sunday. At Smyllum [REDACTED] was known as Sister PFZ.

Smyllum Park, Smyllum

17. Smyllum was more like a house than St Josephs. All the rooms were big. The bedrooms had lots of small beds in them with bathrooms next to the rooms. My impression was that it didn't look like a place where children stayed. There were no

mucky footprints, toys or bikes lying around. It was a dark quiet place. I think that the children had maybe just come back from holiday or a day trip.

18. The staff and children didn't seem to mix. It seemed you had to go looking for children. I thought [REDACTED] PFZ was the only nun there and was [REDACTED]. I think the other nuns must have been on holiday.

Routine at Smyllum

19. When I arrived at Smyllum it was bath time even though it was only about five in the afternoon. One of the lay staff was supervising this. There was about ten children using the same bath water. By the end it was filthy. It was the same with the towel used to dry the children. It was one towel for everyone.
20. I let the bath water away and [REDACTED] PFZ went berserk. She told me that there was no more hot water.
21. After their baths I went into one of their bedrooms with the children. They wanted to play a game with me. They all lined up and wanted a cuddle. The next thing I knew they were all jumping over me having a carry on. At that point [REDACTED] came into the room. She was shouting to stop it. I thought she was shouting at me because I had messed up the bed. I then realised she was shouting at the kids. I said that I would make the bed up but [REDACTED] PFZ told me that they should know better. All the kids then went scurrying away.
22. [REDACTED] PFZ told the children to get into bed. I asked why they weren't getting a story. When I did this [REDACTED] PFZ grabbed a hold of me and pulled me out the room. She said to me, "For god's sake there has to be organisation here". Then in a derogatory tone said that they probably all had nits.
23. After this I went to bed as well. I was in a room on my own. It was horrible. All through the night I could hear kids crying and screaming. There was one kid who kept crying

so I got up. I went into a corridor and bumped into some man who was there. He asked me who I was. When I told him I was Sister PFZ [REDACTED] he just sort of said "Oh okay". I asked why the children were all crying and he told me not to worry.

24. I told PFZ [REDACTED] about what had happened the previous night. PFZ [REDACTED] said that was what they were always like, crying at night.

Mealtimes

25. I wasn't ever at breakfast with the children although I think this was at eight. I remember at lunchtime the kids were sat around a table. There were maybe about ten children at each table. The chairs were far too big. The kids could barely see over the top of the table. The food they were given was like slop. It looked like it was bread mashed into a liquid. I tried eating it but I couldn't. It was awful.
26. I was sitting at a separate table with [REDACTED] and the other staff. We didn't get the same food as the children.
27. I could see the children didn't like the food they had been given. There was a big kitchen right next to the dining room. I offered to make some cheese and toast. If I had been at home this is what I would have done. I thought that Smyllum was supposed to be a home from home for the children so I didn't think what I was doing was wrong.
28. PFZ [REDACTED] turned round and asked me to shut up. There was a child swinging on a chair. PFZ [REDACTED] told the kid if she kept doing it she would be made to stand. This girl then didn't eat her food so PFZ [REDACTED] made her stand in the corner. I think that this was probably a relief to her as she didn't need to eat the food. PFZ [REDACTED] said I should be quiet as the kids would think that they could get away with anything.
29. At one mealtime a girl was left at the table. PFZ [REDACTED] said she hadn't ate her breakfast so it was there for her at lunchtime. She went on to say that the children wouldn't beat her.

30. I know that on a Sunday they were given a piece of cake. I found out later when I went back to St Josephs working with the children that it was exactly the same routine there.

Staff

31. [REDACTED] had told me that I would be better off staying with the staff. When I was with the staff they wanted to know about [REDACTED]. They would ask me what she was like without her habit. The staff wanted to teach me swear words and dirty songs. In the afternoon they took me to the pictures to see 'Carry on Camping'.
32. PFZ treated the staff like servants. She never ever said thanks to them. I got the impression again that PFZ was [REDACTED]. I didn't see any other nuns during the time I was there.

Bed wetting

33. After I got back to Smyllum from the pictures I found PFZ in one of the bedrooms shouting at a boy. The boy was in tears. I shouted, PFZ. She answered me by saying, "It's Sister PFZ". PFZ was screaming at the boy that he would go to bed without any food.
34. I found out that the boy had wet his bed. I said to PFZ that I had wet the bed before and she hadn't shouted at me like that. PFZ replied, "Their not like us". She kept saying to me, "It's Sister PFZ" when I called her by her name. I told her that she wasn't Sister PFZ to me, she was PFZ. Apparently the boy had done something wrong and been sent to the dormitory. When he was sitting on the bed he had wet himself. PFZ put him in the bed even though it was wet.
35. I was only at Smyllum one more night. It was the same as the night before. Shouting and screaming all night. The next day we flew [REDACTED] to Belfast. As soon as I saw my brother [REDACTED] at the airport I just ran away from PFZ.

36. When we got [REDACTED] PFZ went to see my mother first. She told her that she had a surprise for her, then I walked in. My mother was furious. She asked PFZ why she had brought me home and whether it was so that I could watch her dying. PFZ got upset and went downstairs. The first thing my mother asked was what PFZ was like with the kids. I told her that she was terrible. Then my mother said she knew that the nuns would make her like that. My mum said she would talk to her. I don't know if she ever did. It was never really spoken about again.

Life before St Josephs (second time)

37. After my mother died I didn't have much more contact with PFZ. My mother had always encouraged us to write to each other and ask how everyone was doing. This just got less and less and eventually stopped.
38. About a year after my mother died I went back to St Josephs. Again as a relief worker. I was sixteen at the time. I met another girl called [REDACTED] who I became friendly with. [REDACTED] told me that she had stayed in Smyllum as a child. [REDACTED] was about two years older than me.
39. I told [REDACTED] about [REDACTED] being a nun at Smyllum and how I had seen her behave. [REDACTED] told me that was nothing, a lot of the nuns were worse than her.
40. [REDACTED] came to visit me in Belfast. [REDACTED] PFZ was also supposed to visit. This didn't happen when she found out [REDACTED] was there. PFZ told me that people like [REDACTED] weren't like us.
41. I left school at sixteen with no qualifications. This was after having looked after our house for a year. I had also been bullied by the head nun at school.
42. I applied to St Josephs to train as a nurse and was accepted. Two weeks after this I received a phone call from St Josephs. I was told that [REDACTED] PFZ and some other

nuns had been talking. They had decided it would be better for me to stay at the family home for a year to look after my younger sister.

43. My father sent a letter to St Josephs saying he was happy for me to go there and do my training. I was then able to go to St Josephs the following January. It was to be a three year course.

St Josephs, Rosewell, Edinburgh

First day

44. When I arrived back at St Josephs there were nuns and lay staff working there. It was totally different for me since my last time. I didn't know any of the nuns. Myself and another girl called Pauline started at the same time.
45. There was a long drive up to the main building. It was a large building with a number of floors. There were also rooms in the attic. I think there would have been around two hundred patients.
46. A brand new unit had been purpose built for babies. The idea was that staff would be trained to look after these babies, some of who were Down Syndrome.
47. It was just accepted that I had been there before. I was shown what ward I would be starting in. I was then told to be there for eight the next morning. Sister KVB was in charge of my ward.

Uniform

48. I was given a white uniform. There were then different coloured bands for the relevant year of your training. It was a red band for first year, blue band for second year and a purple band for third year. Once you were qualified you had a frill in your cap which showed that you were a staff nurse.

Accommodation

49. There were a number of dormitories on the first floor of the building for some of the patients. Myself and the other first year nurses and the lay staff stayed in the attic rooms. These rooms were freezing cold. In second year you might get a better room in the nurses accommodation. This was a separate building to the hospital.
50. The nuns all stayed in nice rooms.

Children's groups

51. There were both males and females in the hospital. It was split to males on one side and females on the other side. The ages ranged from babies to around forty.
52. The children were split up into different size groups. It depended on their abilities what groups they were in. Those that were able to help in the laundry or similar were in a group. The children that were more dependent on care were in other groups. They wouldn't be able to help out with any work.
53. I thought that a lot of the children didn't need to be in the hospital. There were children at St Josephs from wealthy families. I don't believe that these families wanted the children with them. I think that because this happened they ended up staying there and like some adults spent their life at the hospital.
54. The children would put on concerts to raise funds for the nurses home. I always wondered where the rest of the money went.

Washing routine

55. The kids would line up at the sinks and wait to be washed. There was one face cloth and one tooth brush. Every child used the same face cloth and tooth brush. This meant if one child had an eye infection everyone would get it.

56. I couldn't believe this as there were lots of donations of tooth brushes and face cloths. I had seen boxes of them. When I tried to highlight this the sister never listened or just ignored me.
57. The children would have a bath once a week. It was the same as Smyllum. Everyone used the same bath water.

Wards

58. The first ward I was in was for boys aged six to sixteen. There was about 25 boys in my ward. I would get the boys up in the morning and make sure they were washed. The night shift would have done a handover with us. This would just be a note about any of the children who had maybe been unwell through the night.
59. The young boys in the ward were hyper active. The older boys were medicated so they weren't as bad.
60. The boys would then go for breakfast. If I wasn't helping with breakfast I would assist with making the beds up in the ward.
61. There was always a nun in charge of a ward. Whilst I was there I discovered that none of the nuns were trained to look after children. My mum used to always say that nuns were dangerous as they were never educated.
62. I learned that you weren't supposed to hand out drugs until you were in the third year of training. When I was in first year the nun in charge, Sister Collette, asked me to give the patients their drugs. I told the sister I shouldn't be handing out drugs. I asked why she couldn't do it. That's when I learned they weren't trained. I was told that Sister KWA, who was in overall charge, had said we were to do this.

63. Sister ^{KWA} was a very clever person. I found out that she was doing the same training as the nurses. This meant she would be able to dispense the drugs out. Eventually a clinical nurse was appointed to deal with the prescribed drugs.
64. The wards weren't locked but there was a handle at a normal level and one higher up. This meant you had to use both hands to open a door. The children couldn't reach the higher handle.

Staff routine

65. At first I was seen as underage at St Josephs. During my first year I had to be in bed by eleven. If I wanted to stay out later I had to ask permission.
66. I was treated different from the others as [REDACTED] was a nun. It was almost like I was with the 'in crowd'. I didn't like any of the nuns near to me. They seemed to want to hug you all the time.
67. I learnt about the cruelty of the nuns when I saw them hitting kids. This was apart from Sister ^{KWA}. She did evening classes in Dalkeith. I also went to these classes so I would see her there.

Admission process

68. I was present once when a new baby called [REDACTED] was admitted to the hospital. The child had no notes or records with them. Apparently this child was born through incest. I think one of the nuns had seen the baby's records before they disappeared. Doctor Pilkington from the Royal Edinburgh Hospital came with some students to see the baby. It just seemed to be so wrong. The baby died not long after it was admitted.

Mealtimes

69. Every day for breakfast it was a thick gooey porridge and cups of tea. There was never a choice. If any of the boys didn't eat the porridge Sister ^{KVB} would strap them

to the chair. She would then force feed them the food by holding their mouth open with her hands and putting the food in. Sister KVB would use tea towels knotted together to tie the boys to the chair.

70. If a child was forced to eat their food it would always be one of the nuns that did this. They would just shovel the food in the child's mouth.
71. It was always a mashed up meal because a lot of the children had no teeth due to their medication. It was absolutely disgusting. Every meal was the same apart from breakfast.
72. The adult patients weren't force fed. They were allowed to leave their food.
73. The food that myself and the other staff were given wasn't much better. The nuns ate in a separate room. You would see the food being taken in to them. It smelled a lot better than what the children and the staff were eating.

Schooling

74. Once the new school was built the children started going there after breakfast. We would take them to school. It was only a short walk but some of the children were terrified. They had never been outside so I can only image what it was like for them.
75. It was lay people from outside the hospital that taught at the school. The children loved it.

Leisure time

76. There were no activities arranged for the children. Some of them would be given their medication, largactal, after breakfast. This meant they would be sedated and just fall asleep.

77. Sister KVB called me lazy because I tried to play with the children. They were hyper and needed something to keep them occupied.
78. The only children that would be allowed outside to play were the ones that could speak. They also had to look normal in case anyone from the public saw them.

Trips

79. There were trips to Dunbar in July and August. It was an old army barracks that the nuns had access to. The children would go in small groups for up to two weeks at a time.
80. Sister Dymphna, who was in charge of the young boys, was very popular with the other nuns. She made sure that when her boys were on a trip to Dunbar they were well looked after. They would be given fish and chips. Sister Dymphna's group always stayed for two weeks. Once the boys in her group were older and not cute any more she wouldn't be interested in them.

Healthcare

81. If one of the children had a cold they weren't allowed to stay in bed. The nuns would sometimes give the child a smack for having a messy nose.
82. I don't know who prescribed the medication for the children. In my four years at St Josephs I never saw a doctor visit the wards to see the children.
83. I don't remember a dentist ever visiting the hospital.
84. It always seemed easier for the nuns to medicate than try and find out what was wrong with someone. The medication they were given for sedation was bad for their teeth. If someone was crying no one asked what was wrong. I found a girl who was crying nonstop. She had difficulty communicating but I found out it was period pains that she was suffering from.

85. I was eventually moved to a geriatric ward because I was asking too many questions. Sister ^{KVB} said again that I was lazy, which wasn't the case.

Visits/inspections/reviews

86. If there was an occasion when visitors came to the hospital the prettier girls would welcome them. The visitors never saw any of the other girls.
87. If the visitors were taken on a tour it would be supervised by a nun. The Celtic football team would visit at Christmas and bring presents for the children.
88. Doctor Pilkington from the Royal Edinburgh Hospital would occasionally visit Sister ^{KWA}. This was for talks not to see the children.
89. Doctor Pilkington would sometimes bring students with him to show them what a Down Syndrome child looked like.
90. Every other Sunday a lady would come to the babies ward. I think that she was training to be a teacher. She would be there a couple of hours and take the babies out for a walk in their prams.
91. I can only remember one boy and one girl getting a visit from family members. The boy's father would come every week and take him horse riding. The girl's father would come every other Saturday and take the little girl out for the day.
92. There were no social work visits that I was aware of. I never saw any inspections. If there was an inspection the nuns would have taken the people to the areas that they wanted them to see.
93. There were no reviews into the care of the children. I don't know how there could have been as there were no records for them.

Christmas/birthdays

- 94. Some of the children would be picked up by their family at Christmas. They would be taken home for a day or maybe a couple of days.
- 95. Christmas wasn't celebrated with the patients. There was nothing different from any other day. The nuns had a Christmas dinner but not the staff or patients.
- 96. I worked one Christmas. It was so depressing that I never worked one again. I always felt guilty that the children didn't have any Christmas presents.
- 97. There were presents and donations handed in for the children. I don't know what happened to these things because the children were never given them. I think that the nuns might have taken them for themselves or their families.
- 98. The children's birthdays were never celebrated at the hospital.

Training

- 99. The training was split up into different blocks. These blocks meant you were supposed to work with adults, adolescents, children and babies. This didn't happen for me. I wanted to work with children but didn't really get the chance to until I was qualified in my third year. There seemed to be favourites with the nuns. These girls would get to stay in the one place for most of their training. Some of the other nurses didn't finish their training because of this. They just left.
- 100. Part of my training was to do a case study on a particular child. This would include what interaction I had with that child. It would also include what I did to stimulate them.
- 101. When I did this I tried to access the case files for certain children. I couldn't find any files for any children. I brought this up and was told I would go to the Deaconess

Hospital to do a case study there. I was only there a month and there was no real opportunity to do the case study for my exams.

102. I was told that the children's case files at St Josephs were kept under lock and key in Sister Roselee's office. I asked if I could look at them in the office. The nun I asked just said that Sister Roselee was too busy for this to happen.

Other information

103. Sister Patricia told me that if a child didn't understand or make their first communion then there was no need to bother with them. The thinking was that if a child didn't take communion they wouldn't go to heaven. My understanding was that this was the case throughout the Catholic church.

Abuse at St Josephs

104. The nuns would lash out at the children and hit them. This would be mostly on the face. It would be with whatever was in their hands at that time. Sister ^{KVB} would use wet tea towels or a shoe to hit the children. The nuns seemed to make the rules up as they went along.
105. One morning I was helping a little boy at the toilet. He had red marks on his bottom. I couldn't think what had made these marks. One of the other staff, Janet, said that it was made by the bristles of a brush. I realised then that Sister ^{KVB} must have hit him on the bottom with the brush. Janet asked Sister ^{KVB} if it was her. She said it wasn't and it must have been Sister ^{PGB}. This was a bit strange as Sister ^{PGB} didn't work in that ward.
106. If the children saw the nuns they would run away as fast as they could. If you were walking around the hospital you would sometimes come across a nun hitting a child when they thought no one was looking. The children were so used to it they just stood there and took it.

107. One of my biggest disappointments was turning a corner and seeing Sister ^{KWA} hitting a girl called [REDACTED]. She was walloping her again and again on the face. [REDACTED]'s face was bright red because of this. When Sister ^{KWA} saw me she asked what sort of nursing it was that allowed girls like [REDACTED] to wander around the corridors.
108. If anyone wet the bed they would be punished. One of the older boys, [REDACTED], who was about fourteen used to wet the bed. He adored Sister ^{KVB} but she made him parade up and down in his wet pyjamas. This was humiliating for him. He would beg her for forgiveness.
109. I would say that the punishments by the nuns happened every day.

Reporting of abuse at St Josephs

110. When I was in the third year of my training I was really depressed and was starting to lose my faith because of what I had seen at St Josephs. I went to see the local priest, Father Logan, at Rosewell. I told Father Logan how I was feeling. I also informed him about how the nuns were treating the children. He said to me to pray harder and ask God to help the nuns do their jobs better. I asked Father Logan if there was anything he could say from the pulpit as the children were being treated cruelly by the nuns. Father Logan said he couldn't interfere with how the nuns did their jobs as this was how they had done it for years.
111. I had a medical tutor called Frank. He would come into St Josephs and do study blocks. I told him what was happening and said I wanted to leave. He just kept saying I had six months training to go then you will be gone and have a qualification. I told him he didn't understand as he wasn't on the ward. He just said again to finish my qualification.

Leaving

112. Once I had my nursing qualification I left St Josephs. At this time I was twenty years old.

Life after St Joseph's

113. I managed to get a job at Dingleton Hospital in Melrose. I met my ex-husband and ended up moving back to Edinburgh.
114. I was contacted by the education department and offered a job teaching children in the school back at St Josephs. I was about 22 by this time.
115. When I went back to St Josephs, Sister **PUW** was in charge. I had to go the main building for my lunch. It had the same smell as before at mealtimes. I was so glad that I had left when I did.
116. I saw Sister **KWA** at lunch. She said to me that she couldn't believe I had just left after all they had done for me. She also said that she couldn't believe the nuns weren't invited to my wedding.
117. A couple of months after I started I left on maternity leave. After this I never went back to St Josephs'.
118. **PFZ** had now left the church and ended up marrying a priest. I was still trying to protect her but she didn't care. I even let them use my house as a meeting point. Since she was married I have maybe seen **PFZ** four times in the last twenty years. She behaved like the life as a nun never existed.

Impact

119. My time at St Josephs had a big impact on my daughter at Christmas and Birthdays. I was always thinking about when I was at St Josephs and what happened to the children there at these times.
120. If I saw a nun I used to think about tripping them up or hitting them because of what they had been like when I was training. I don't like being in large groups in case there is a nun there that I might not have noticed before.
121. I feel that I don't trust people. My present husband and daughter have had to live with this.

Reporting of Abuse

122. I have never reported what I saw at St Josephs to the police. I don't think that they would have understood.

Lessons to be Learned

123. I think that there should have been more training for the nuns. Nuns weren't educated and too young when they went to a convent. The nuns had no qualifications to do teaching or nursing.
124. There should have been more openness to allow checks to be carried out by unexpected visitors.
125. Children in care should be allowed to play and spend time with other children.

Other information

126. [REDACTED] PFZ was known by a number of names whilst she was a nun. These were Sister PFZ, Sister PFZ, Sister PFZ, Sister PFZ and maybe two more names but I can't remember these.
127. 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.....

23rd Nov 2018