

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PSJ

Support person present: Yes.

1. My name is PSJ. My date of birth is 1942. When I was at school my surname was PSJ. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in [REDACTED] and lived there for the first part of my life. My mother, [REDACTED] known as [REDACTED]. It was during the war and a very different time back then. I'm not sure of my mum's surname at that time but she later met and married a man called [REDACTED] who lived in [REDACTED] and we moved there. I'm not sure how old I was then. My mum went on to have another two daughters with [REDACTED]. We moved a few times and later lived in [REDACTED].
3. As far as I know, I wasn't born deaf. My mum didn't ever learn sign language so could never communicate with me. She could do some basic finger spelling but that was it. My mother couldn't ever really explain it to me but I think I possibly went deaf after [REDACTED]. However, my sister thought that it was possibly from a [REDACTED]. I was the only deaf member of my family and was deaf when I started school. I'm not sure how the decision was made to send me to Donaldson's school or who was involved in that.

Donaldson's school for the Deaf, Junior School, Henderson Row, Edinburgh

4. There was a nursery, known as the 'baby school,' for children who were three or four and a primary school, both being at Henderson Row. I was around this age. They were separate buildings but on the same campus.
5. Throughout my time at primary school, I boarded at Henderson Row. At that time, even though my home wasn't too far from the school, it was too far to travel back and forth.
6. I don't remember how many staff were there but I remember there being a matron, a supervisor and a teacher. The teachers looked after us within the classroom and the matron and supervisor looked after us out with the classroom. The matron and supervisor had similar roles but matron supervised mealtimes and the supervisor looked after the boarding side more, overseeing bedtimes and any other time out with the classroom. There were two matrons during my time there, the first one was a bigger lady and she was horrible to me. I don't know how long she was there but she did leave and was replaced by another matron who was much nicer. I'm not sure if there was a separate headteacher or if it was the supervisor who was in charge of the whole school.
7. I can't remember how many children were there but my class was only a small group, less than twenty children. There were boys and girls at Henderson Row but we were in separate classes. We slept in dorm rooms, although I'm not sure how many girls were in each bedroom. The rooms were really cold and I remember once having a Highland toffee and we had to put it on the radiator to soften it as it had gone so hard in the cold.
8. All of the children at primary school were deaf but there were also some with additional disabilities. The staff were harsher with those with other disabilities. None of the staff used sign language so weren't able to communicate with us at all.

Routine at Donaldson's school for the Deaf, Junior School

First memories

9. My first memories from school are being age three or four and being brought to the nursery at Henderson Row by my mum. I went to the nursery there and then went onto primary school when I got to primary school age. The primary school was in the same place but was a separate building.

Mealtimes/Food

10. Matron supervised the mealtimes and I remember having to eat porridge that was horrible and lumpy. It was too salty and really wasn't good. I'd take the lumps out and put them on the ridge of my plate. Sometimes matron would tell us to eat the lumps but I didn't want to because they made me feel sick, so I always refused. The food in general was poor quality and I didn't really eat very much when I was there.

Washing/bathing

11. There were showers downstairs in the basement of the building. It was confusing for us because we were so young and we didn't know how to look after ourselves. We didn't know how to wash ourselves but there was no support from staff, I'm not even sure if matron was there or not when we showered.

Schooling

12. I remember in primary, the teachers were quite good. I have a memory of asking the teacher a question when I was young and the teacher saying that I could go and look at the clock. I'm not sure if she was trying to tell me that the lesson was over soon but I was quite frightened as I didn't know how to tell the time. She was nice though.
13. I can't really remember what I was taught at primary school. The teaching was heavily focused on lip-reading as British Sign Language (BSL) wasn't around when I was at

primary and I don't think we were taught any sign. The children would sign to each other but it wasn't BSL or finger spelling. We created our own signs and gestured with each other.

Healthcare

14. There was a sick room at the school if you were ever ill or needed medical care. I remember an occasion when a girl, who was in the nursery, was playing and threw a rock over a wall at a tree but it went right through the tree and hit me on the head. It was just a complete accident, I was bleeding quite heavily and I went to the school nurse who cleaned it but didn't really take proper care of me. I thought the nurse should have sent me to hospital to check that my skull wasn't cracked as it was really bad. I didn't get any stitches, didn't see a doctor and I was just left to it. I don't think my mum and dad were told about it either.

Religious instruction

15. In primary the teacher talked about the Bible and I was quite interested but anytime we went to church I was bored as I didn't know what was going on. It was a hearing church and there were no attempts made to interpret for us so I had no idea what was going on.

Family contact

16. I boarded at Henderson Row and would be at school for three months or so without going home at all, and then I'd only get home for a weekend. I can't remember if we went home for a long summer holiday or just stayed at Henderson Row throughout the full year. Every time I had to go back to school I would cry because I hadn't seen my family in a long time and didn't want to leave.
17. I had no visits from my family whilst I was at Henderson Row.

Abuse at Donaldson's school for the Deaf, Junior School

Supervisor

18. The supervisor was a woman but I can't remember her name. She was older at the time, maybe in her 30's but I can't remember fully.
19. Parents would send their children with a cuddly toy from home to stop them being homesick but the supervisor would take them from the children and put them in the cupboard. On my first day at primary school, I brought my small notepad with pencils as I loved art. The supervisor was taking other children's toys off of them so I put them under my pants to hide them but she took them off me anyway and put them in a cupboard. She smacked my bottom as I was not allowed to keep my things. She had a cupboard full of toys that had been taken off of the children.
20. She also put me in a cold bath that made me gasp for breath. It was awful, there was no reason to put me in that cold water, it was absolutely freezing. Even when I got out I only had a rough linen towel to dry myself and I was freezing. I don't know if it happened to others but it definitely happened to me. Maybe I was a bad girl but she just put me in this freezing water and I didn't know why.
21. During the summer, because the nights were lighter, we'd be in the bedroom jumping, running about and playing games. We couldn't sleep, even with the curtains drawn, because it was too bright. We'd be playing in the room and someone would signal or gesture that the supervisor was coming so we'd run back to bed and pretend that we were sleeping. She would come in and would listen to your breathing. I'd hold my breath and keep my eyes closed but if she could tell that you weren't sleeping you'd get a smack with a hairbrush. It was sometimes on the bum or leg but always with a hairbrush. I don't remember it leaving a mark or bruising, it was one hit rather than multiple hits.
22. She was absolutely awful and smacked girls for no reason. I remember quite vividly seeing her hit one girl, [REDACTED], so hard that it left a handprint. I don't think [REDACTED] was the

same age as me or in my class but she was disabled and had [REDACTED]. I'm not sure if it was maybe when we were washing or at bedtime but she had a bare back and the supervisor hit her on her bare skin, it was awful. I don't know why [REDACTED] was hit but I'll never forget that. I know that [REDACTED] has passed away now.

Matron

23. The first matron we had was awful. She was responsible for us at mealtimes. We got a snack of an apple and we all had to stand in a line to eat it. We had to eat all of the apple, including the core. We weren't allowed to leave anything, only the stalk. I don't remember what happened if you didn't eat it.
24. At mealtimes we were told to eat everything and I witnessed children who had eaten their meals, be sick, and be made to eat their sick by the matron. It never happened to me but I did see it happen to others.
25. Matron also carried a lot of keys that she would use to hit people on the head. I don't know why she did it but she would smack me on the head with the keys. My friends and I would sign to each other, although it was child signing, gestures and just what we used at school. Matron would get angry because we were noisy. We couldn't hear each other so maybe we were quite loud and she wanted us to stop. She would hit me and others with the keys but we didn't know why.
26. I don't remember there being any other members of staff about when the abuse was happening. It was always the one matron at mealtimes and one supervisor in the boarding house.

PXB [REDACTED]

27. PXB [REDACTED] was a teacher at the primary school and was a young man at the time. He took us for swimming and whilst I could swim, I preferred to be where I could stand, I didn't like the deep water. I didn't want to dive as I was frightened but he was telling us to dive. I refused to dive and on one occasion he picked me up from behind and

threw me into the water. It was horrible and I had to find a way to paddle out. I don't remember him doing it to anyone else.

28. On another occasion in his classroom, he hit my hand with a thick piece of wood because I was blethering too much with my friends. We would be signing to each other and he wasn't happy with that. The wood was a thick, large piece of wood, about two feet long and it really hurt. It was just me that got hit with it, I didn't see anyone else getting hit.
29. PXB left the school while I was there.

Other incidents

30. There was just a general lack of care. There was an occasion that I just remembered about recently where I nearly drowned. I was fully dressed and was walking through the pool area. I slipped, fell in the pool and when I fell in I didn't know which way was up. I was struggling to get out and I couldn't work out how to get up to the surface. There were no staff around and another schoolgirl managed to get into the water, come down and rescue me. I couldn't remember what had happened afterwards, it was like a blackout, I definitely passed out. I'm not sure if I got any medical treatment for it or not. If it wasn't for that girl I don't think the school would have even known about it. It was never mentioned again and I don't think they ever told my mum as she never mentioned it.
31. Matron, the supervisor and teachers weren't able to communicate with us. Nobody signed so it was all visual cues and physical force. They would talk to us but we had no clue what it was they were saying. The teachers would write on the board and we would just copy things. There was no interaction with us in our language. There was maybe a bit of frustration amongst the teachers and staff that we were talking amongst ourselves and that was what lead to punishments, like being hit with matron's keys.

Leaving

32. I moved from Donaldson's primary school at Henderson Row up to the High School at West Coates.

Donaldson's school for the Deaf, Senior School, West Coates, Edinburgh

33. I was eleven when I moved to Donaldson's High School at West Coates. I was moved up early as most children moved at age twelve or thirteen.
34. I can't remember how many children there were in total at high school but there were a mix of both male and female pupils. Generally, the female teachers taught the girls and male teachers taught the boys. The staff were strict about boys and girl being separate, even at playtime and leisure time. We sometimes mixed for parties, like Halloween or Christmas but that was the only time that we were allowed to mix.
35. In the building itself, the bathrooms were in the basement, there was a games room on the ground floor and the bedrooms were upstairs. We slept in rooms with rows of single beds opposite each other, like a hospital ward. The younger children were separated from the older ones so you would be in a room with other children around the same age as you. The younger girls always wanted to mix with the older ones but we'd send them away. The bedrooms were cold, there was heating but it didn't heat the room much because it was such a big room. Not everyone boarded at Donaldson's, some of the pupils lived locally so were able to go home every night.
36. We had 'houses' and we wore coloured patches according to the house you were in, I had a [REDACTED] coloured badge. We also had prefects at the school and I became a prefect while I was there. As a prefect you had responsibility to look after some younger children, doing things like checking they had made their beds. We also got to sleep in a different room to everyone else as a prefect which was much smaller and maybe only had four beds.

37. The headmaster was nice but he left as he moved to new school. His name was Jeffrey, although I'm not sure if that was first or second name.
38. At the senior school, there was a nice matron who kept an eye on things and looked after us. She'd make sure we were washing and looking after ourselves.

Routine at Donaldson's school for the Deaf, Senior School

Mornings and bedtime

39. We would wake up in the morning and go downstairs to wash our faces, I remember it being really cold on the ground floor. We would get dressed and then go for breakfast. I can't remember what the rest of the day looked like. I think we must've gone on to classes but it was a long time ago so I'm not sure.
40. We finished school about 3:30 pm then go to the playroom for a blether with each other. We had dinner at about 5:00 pm and we had to be in bed at 8:00pm. Bedtime stayed the same right up until I left at sixteen, it was really early by then. During the winter it was at least dark but in the summer it was still so bright and we still had to go to bed.

Mealtimes/Food

41. I never liked the food at Donaldson's. We would all eat together in the dining room but the boys and girls were still separated. The teachers walked about the dining room at mealtimes.

Washing/bathing

42. We'd have a sink bath through the week and then on a Friday before you went home you had a full bath. There was no privacy for bathing. There were no showers, just

baths which were in the room with a lot of sinks. I do remember pulling out the plug as I got out of the bath so I think it was fresh water for everybody.

Clothing/uniform

43. We wore a big red ribbon bow in our hair, a navy blue pinafore with a blouse and black socks. In summer we still had to wear the long black socks even though it was really hot. We'd roll them down to our ankles to try and be cooler. The school gave us our uniform or they gave my mum an allowance for clothes but we didn't have to buy them ourselves. We got one pair of shoes and if your feet grew, you just had to keep wearing them. We had to wait until everybody was ready for a new pair so you could be wearing the wrong size shoes for some time.
44. There was a laundry at the school so on a Friday you would leave your uniform and you'd get a fresh uniform to put on when you got back on a Monday. The uniforms all went to the laundry together, you didn't have your name on anything so you didn't get your own uniform back. It could be anybody's clothes that you were handed back and you just checked that it fitted.

Leisure time

45. I think we maybe had some free time to play between dinner and bed when we played out the front on the big grassy area. There was an internal square within the building but we weren't allowed in there. I stuck by the rules and didn't ever go in there. There was a games room too that we would sometimes go into and we played basketball and hockey too.

Schooling

46. The teachers weren't good and there was not enough education, it was very poor. The teaching was too childish for me and they didn't seem to believe in teaching children in the way you would teach children now. We were only taught a basic level of maths and English and the focus was on cooking classes, sewing, swimming and life saving

skills. I have certificates for swimming and life saving but no other formal qualifications from school.

47. The only teachers that were good were the male teachers, the female teachers weren't. I remember having a good English teacher, possibly called Mr Newland, for a short period of time but he was replaced by a woman who wasn't as good. I was never happy with the teachers. No teacher signed, it was lip-reading only and we were expected to understand.

Healthcare

48. A male doctor did come and visit the school and he did a mass check-up of all the girls. We all had to stand in a line and take our vests off. We would cover our chests as we were just wearing pants, and the doctor would listen to our chests. I don't remember how often that happened.
49. There was a rest, infirmary type room within the school where you went if you were ill. I had mumps when I was [REDACTED] and had to go to the rest room. I wasn't seen by a doctor, just the school nurse who checked me over. I was only in the rest room for a day and was then sent back to my dorm to rest but was kept separate from everyone else. I remember it was my birthday when I had mumps so I didn't get any cake or birthday celebrations.
50. If you had a cut you didn't get a bandage, you were just left to it. There wasn't much care. When you started your period you had to ask an old woman supervisor for a sanitary towel. You only got one towel a day. The matron said it should be three towels a day but the supervisor only ever gave you one. Because you had one towel on all day, your clothes would be soiled but it was then your responsibility to clean your own clothes and dry them on the radiator. It was horrible. We didn't have access to go and get our own towels but we knew there was a cupboard in the attic where they stored the towels, so we would steal them and run back to our rooms with them.

51. There was no sex education or information about periods at school. Everything I knew was all from home. At school we were only taught about keeping clean from a hygiene angle, nothing else.
52. The school took us to a local dentist at Haymarket. We'd get haircuts during the holidays or weekends at home out with school time so I kept my hair really short.

Religious instruction

53. We occasionally went to church for a service and we wore straw hats to go to church. A teacher would take us but there was no signing. I just sat bored throughout the service because I couldn't hear what was going on, so I just watched. Sometimes we did some crafts and reading there.

Birthdays and Christmas

54. There wasn't much of a celebration of a birthday, I felt that I should have got a cake but that never happened. There was really no acknowledgement of a birthday.
55. There were some other celebrations, we occasionally had parties for Christmas or Halloween but that was it.

Visitors / External Inspections

56. I don't remember having any visitors at Donaldson's and I don't remember anyone else getting visitors either. I don't remember there ever being any inspectors in the school.

Family contact

57. When I got to Donaldson's the headmaster asked where I lived and when he found out I lived in [REDACTED] he said that I could go home every weekend. I was absolutely ecstatic about that, the fact that I could get home every weekend. I had to go on my

own on the bus, but my school friend, [REDACTED] lived near to [REDACTED] so we'd go to [REDACTED] bus station together and get the bus from there. Normally you had to be twelve or thirteen to go home on your own but I was allowed to do it when I was eleven.

Discipline

- 58. I don't remember how children were disciplined if they misbehaved but the boys were trouble. They were always separate from us though so we didn't really see what was going on, or how they got in trouble from staff.
- 59. I remember once, the boys looking in the girls' bathroom window. We didn't tell a teacher as we didn't want to create any trouble.

Abuse at Donaldson's school for the Deaf, Senior School

- 60. The wearing of hearing aids were enforced at Donaldson's. They were really old fashioned, big heavy clunky things with big battery packs that sat on your chest. I did actually have some hearing in one ear, that was my better ear, but I lost the hearing in that ear, I think, as a result of being made to wear the hearing aids. I had no hearing at all after I started wearing the aids. After that I refused to wear them because I couldn't hear anything so it wasn't worth it. I got told by my teacher to go to the headmistress but she accepted that I was refusing to wear the aids. I think the teacher was a bit taken a back that the head mistress had agreed with me.
- 61. No staff at Donaldson's signed, everything was lip-reading only so I missed a lot. Donaldson's didn't want us to sign to each other either.
- 62. In the dining room the teachers walked around while we ate, but the male teachers stayed with the boys and the female teachers stayed with the girls. I remember one mealtime, a male teacher came over and touched a girl's shoulder, he shouldn't have been there but he was. The girl didn't like her shoulder being touched so she brushed him off and he retaliated by banging her head off of the table. I don't know if he didn't

like her or if he thought she was being cheeky to him but she was only thirteen or fourteen at the time and he shouldn't have been there.

Leaving

63. I left Donaldson's at age sixteen. There weren't any exams that I remember and I think I just got a certificate of attendance from the school. I didn't have any formal qualifications.

Life after being in care

64. I went back to live with my family in [REDACTED] and got a job working at [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. There were two other deaf girls who worked there, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who had been at school with me. I don't remember if I interviewed for the job or if it was arranged through the school. I worked there for a long time before I got another job working at [REDACTED] doing the same sort of thing and for a period of time I worked in drama, [REDACTED]. I also worked as [REDACTED] for a long time and was [REDACTED] during my working life too.
65. I met my husband [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] when I was twelve, although we didn't date then but just talked to each other. When I was about twenty, I was still living with my mum at the time and I got together with [REDACTED]. We got married in [REDACTED] and lived in the [REDACTED] area of Edinburgh in a small rental flat. We moved to [REDACTED] Edinburgh where we bought our first flat and in 1969 started our family, going on to have two daughters, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and one son, [REDACTED]. We lived there for ten years or so before we moved to a bigger flat in [REDACTED] where there was more room.
66. I had started going to deaf club at age sixteen and I really enjoyed it then. I used to go quite regularly and the deaf church there became important in my life. The Minister at

the church, [REDACTED], was very nice but he left and the old man who took over would finger spell, get tired and fall asleep.

67. There is still a deaf club for the over fifties, the [REDACTED] Club, but I've stopped going now because of where it is. It's not very accessible for me. A long time ago it was good but it's not so great anymore.

Impact

68. I feel angry and upset that I was allowed to be in a situation where I could have drowned. If there hadn't been anyone else around I could have passed away. Thinking about that is the worst thing for me from my time at Donaldson's.
69. I do think about my time at Donaldson's quite a bit, particularly the primary school, and it's upsetting. My mum didn't ever know what was going on, I couldn't have told them and my mum never even asked about school, I just bottled it up and got on with it. I didn't ever tell anyone about what happened at school. I didn't want to think about it again.
70. The education side of Donaldson's was awful but it's difficult to say whether things would have been different if the education had been different. We were never taught sign language at Donaldson's and that could have made a big difference. I'm not sure how I learned to sign, I think maybe we learned from each other at school and from those who knew some sign. The teachers didn't ever sign to us, they were insistent on lip-reading and we were just told to keep quiet.
71. I left school with only a basic level of English. I didn't have any confidence in my reading or writing and have relied on my daughter to help me with that throughout my life. Even now, I have [REDACTED] and have been given a lot of medical information leaflets which I find difficult to understand which impacts the management of my own healthcare.

72. As awful as Donaldsons was, if I had been at home, my life wouldn't have been any better. I had nobody around me, my mum, dad or two sisters couldn't sign. My sisters would be playing games with other children and they would push me out because I was deaf, communication was difficult. It made me upset and isolated and I would just sit there on my own watching them. There was an old woman who lived nearby [REDACTED]. She was really nice to me and that helped with the isolation.
73. I was lonely at home and had nobody to sign with so I was better off at school. I would have rather always gone to Donaldson's than stay at home because staying at home would have been lonely. Despite the cruelty, I was better off at Donaldson's where I had friends who I could speak to.

Treatment/support

74. I have never had any treatment or support in relation to my time at Donaldson's.

Reporting of Abuse

75. I haven't ever reported what happened to me at Donaldson's to anyone. I'm a private person so haven't ever shared my experiences, I don't like to gossip with others so keep it to myself. I didn't tell anybody what was going on at the time. I didn't tell my mum as she couldn't sign, she never learned. She could do some basic finger spelling but that was it and trying to explain my abuse was very complex so I kept it to myself.

Records

76. I have a copy of some of my school reports from Donaldson's, both the junior and senior school.

77. In junior school my report details language, lipreading, speech, arithmetic, handwork and swimming. In senior school my report details English, history, geography, arithmetic, nature study, lipreading, speech, handwork, art, woodwork, domestic science (sewing and knitting), gardening, boot-repair, dressmaking, physical training and swimming. The subjects weren't typically educational and the reports don't detail much in terms of academic progress, only stating average, good, or very good against each subject.

Lessons to be learned

78. I think it's good that I have shared my experiences. The truth wasn't known and I think everybody would be surprised to hear what went on at Donaldson's. There was so much abuse and so many children experienced that. I hope that parents might read about my experiences and, not knowing that that sort of thing happened, they might tell their children about it to keep them safe and check on their children at school. By sharing my story, it might help to keep children safe now.
79. I don't know if schools are better for deaf children now, but I think that teachers should be signing to deaf children, not just being insistent on lip-reading. Teachers should be looking at the report from the Inquiry and thinking that they could do things better.

Other information

80. 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..... 17th April 2025