

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Susanne Goetzold

Support person present: No

1. My full name is Susanne Goetzold. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1961. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I have contacted the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry because, when I heard that Donaldson's School for the Deaf was being re-investigated, I felt I should tell them about an enquiry I was involved in, which, I felt, may have prevented children from coming forward to report abuse.

Qualifications and work experience

3. I qualified as a social worker in 1997, with a Diploma in Social Work. I then started with Edinburgh Council Children and Families, pretty much immediately.
4. I started as a locum worker and was then offered a permanent post in [REDACTED] Edinburgh, working at [REDACTED] Children and Families Team in [REDACTED].
5. In 1999, during my employment with Edinburgh Council, I completed the Post Qualifying Certificate in Child Protection Studies. I also completed Joint Investigative Interview Training, towards the end of 1998 or possibly in 1999.
6. I then went to Grangemouth and worked as a social worker in a community school there for about four years. I was then employed by Stirling Council on behalf of the Forth Valley Practice Learning Centre, as a social work practice teacher.

7. I did that for about a year before moving to a different post within Stirling Council as a Professional Development Manager for Children's Services. I did that for a couple of years before moving again within Stirling Council.
8. I was then employed on behalf of the Forth Valley Child Protection Committee as a Child Protection Trainer for about eleven years. During this period, in 2006, I completed my Joint Investigative Interview Training for Trainers and I subsequently also passed my MSc Applied Studies (Child Welfare and Protection). From there, I was seconded into a part-time post at Edinburgh Napier University to teach on their Child Protection Certificate Course.
9. I took voluntary severance from Stirling Council two years ago and I was then employed by Edinburgh Napier University, where I work now. My work has always been with children and families.

The [REDACTED] Family

10. At the end of 1997, I was working as a social worker with Edinburgh Council Children and Families from [REDACTED]. About that time I was allocated to a young person called [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. I can't remember which.
11. [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] years old and he was [REDACTED] in a deaf family. He had been referred to the Children's Reporter [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
12. I started working with [REDACTED], and as part of that process I started visiting the family quite a lot and got to know his mother, father and [REDACTED] sister, PHL [REDACTED], who was about [REDACTED] years old. PHL was a day pupil at Donaldson's School for the Deaf, [REDACTED].

13. After a period of time, I can't remember how long it was, I got a phone call from Donaldson's School saying that PHL had requested to speak to me about [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s behaviour towards her.
14. I went to the school and met with PHL along, with the assistance of the head teacher or one of the other teachers, I can't remember who, but it was someone who could sign. PHL signed, as she had no hearing, and she made allegations against [REDACTED] in terms of physical and emotional abuse.
15. PHL said [REDACTED] was hitting her and shouting at her. She was not allocated to me, but I incorporated what she had said into my work [REDACTED]. I then had further contact from the school saying that she wanted to make further allegations against [REDACTED].
16. These allegations started to escalate and I saw PHL about two or three times. Eventually I had a meeting with my line manager and the team manager and it was decided that should PHL make any further allegations we would treat it as a child protection referral.
17. The allegations were put to [REDACTED] at the time but he denied them, saying that PHL was making them up. We did believe PHL at the time and some of the allegations were supported by PHL's parents.
18. It was borderline child protection and was more about stepping things up, so the family got the message we were taking it seriously, rather than ever getting to the stage where any criminal charges would be brought against [REDACTED].

Donaldson's School for the Deaf - Allegations by PHL [REDACTED]

Initial Joint Interview

19. The next time PHL made an allegation, would have been in about [REDACTED] 1998. I went out to see her at the family home in Edinburgh along with a police officer. I

would say, at that point in time it was very unlikely that I would have been Joint Interview trained. From memory, I'm pretty sure the police officer, who was a female uniformed officer wasn't Joint Interview trained either.

20. The general rule in Edinburgh Council at that time was that child protection work should only be undertaken by staff who had at least started on the Dundee Child Protection Certificate Course. I had not started that course, at that time.
21. However, the decision for me to remain involved was reflected by the fact that the interview was very low tariff, we were basically trying to give a message to the family [REDACTED] because I knew the family and PHL had requested to speak to me.
22. It was felt that she had built up a trusting relationship with me and that it would have been counter-productive to involve another social worker at that stage. When we met PHL on that occasion, she was with her mum and dad and an interpreter was present. There were no school staff in attendance, they were only involved in meetings at the school, not at home.
23. At all the previous meetings with PHL at the school, it had been teaching staff that carried out the communication, through signing. When I was at PHL's home, with the police officer, it was the approved interpreter, I think her name was Mary. I believe it was the Deaf Society who provided the interpreters, which would have been organised by the police on that occasion.
24. Basically, I spoke to PHL and the interpreter signed what I said to PHL. PHL then signed to the interpreter and the interpreter told me what PHL had said.
25. As soon as we started PHL made allegations that were actually nothing to do with [REDACTED]. She went straight into making very serious allegations against staff at Donaldson's school. It was all completely out of the blue and was not something any of us were expecting.

26. In particular, she made allegations of physical abuse against the head teacher, David Scott, and allegations of sexual abuse against a male PE teacher. I don't remember his name, but I did know David Scott. In those days we didn't recognise emotional abuse to the same extent as we do now, but some of what she was saying did relate to emotional abuse.
27. PHL told us that David Scott, the head teacher, was physically abusive to children, he was hitting and pinching them, including herself. She also spoke of him bullying pupils by shouting at them and belittling them, which would be described as emotional abuse nowadays.
28. She provided a very detailed description of what was going on, and I remember being there for several hours, taking that statement. In relation to David Scott, it was basically hitting and pinching children with his hands. I can't remember where on the body or where about in the school she said it had happened, but she did say she had bruises at times.
29. PHL described having had bruises on her back and on her arms after been held by the arms but there were no current injuries and there was no physical examination carried out. The allegations had all been over a period of time and she said there were no current bruises.
30. The allegations she made against the member of PE staff were of a sexual nature and, again involved hitting but also inappropriate touching of children in the changing room area of the school. I cannot fully remember all the details of that but she did mention the touching was on her bottom and on her breasts. There was no physical examination.
31. I took the lead in asking questions because I knew PHL already. The police officer took notes, I can't remember if they were in a police notebook or not. I remember coming out afterwards and the police officer and I were absolutely shocked because we had not expected anything like that.

32. I would say that although I was taken aback I was not completely surprised because I had always felt really uncomfortable with David Scott. I was uncomfortable with the way he communicated with the children in the school. He would shout at children when we were walking along the corridors. It was very dominating and was going back to schooldays from about twenty years earlier, rather than the supportive environment I expected at Donaldson's.
33. I also know from the reaction of PHL's parents during the interview she hadn't told them any of this before. I do know she had made it clear to them previously that she was not happy at the school but they were definitely taken aback by those allegations.
34. Afterwards I phoned the duty senior, as it was after hours. She communicated with Martin Henry, the Child Protection Co-ordinator, who worked at Shrubhill House and he then indicated that there had been a suspicion that something was going on at the school.
35. I don't remember the duty senior's name but she would have been either a Senior Social Worker or a Team Manager. She was based at Muirhouse Crescent Social Work Centre, where the duty team was based. Social Workers "on duty" would work from this base for their duty shifts. Anne Thomson, who was my senior, was a Senior Social Worker.
36. This was because, at the same point in time, a joint HMIE which is, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Care Commission Inspection, was going on at Donaldson's and they had picked up concerns, but none of the children were talking to them. They were just waiting for someone to speak up.
37. It was basically out of my hands to some extent after that and there was some discussion between seniors and team leaders within the social work and the police family unit. It was then decided to have an investigation and a follow up interview was arranged.

Second Joint Interview

38. I was also involved in the follow up interview, which was a few days after the first interview. It was a different police officer, but another female, and she was Joint Interview trained. There was an interpreter, a different one, who was not an approved interpreter, because they couldn't find one. PHL's mum and dad were at home but I don't think they were actually in the room for that interview.
39. I remember going back to the family home for the interview but I really have no memory of it. The police officer asked all the questions and I was taking notes. The purpose was to ask follow up questions. The police wanted further clarification on the location and names and details of other people involved.
40. What I can remember is that PHL was absolutely specific in her allegations and described everything in enormous detail, about the physical aspects and the names of people. I remember we were all surprised, at the time, with the amount of detail she was able to provide.
41. My notes were photocopied by the police officer, she kept the originals as evidence and I got a copy for our social work file. I then provided verbal feedback to my senior, Anne Thomson, and my team manager, Jill Guthrie.
42. I do remember the use of the interpreter for that second interview was an issue at the time. It was not an approved interpreter and I remember I challenged some of her interpretation, when I knew PHL would have used different words.
43. For example, at one point the interpreter said PHL stated she had been touched on the bottom, whereas PHL actually said she had been touched on the arse. I didn't feel the interpreter was giving an exact interpretation so I didn't have a lot of confidence as to the accuracy that interpreter was providing.
44. As it was a non-familial issue, it then went to the police to deal with. The allegations against [REDACTED] were kind of left to the side at that point.

45. The next thing that happened was the police got back in touch with me and told me they had disproved every allegation PHL had made.

Final Interview

46. As a result of the police findings I was asked to go back with the police to see PHL for a third time to take a retraction statement. That happened quite quickly, probably within a couple of days of our second interview.
47. I then went back to the home address again, with two plain clothes police officers from the Family Unit. On that occasion my role was to be there, in the background, as a social work representative. The police went through each and every allegation PHL had made, and presented her with evidence to suggest it couldn't have happened.
48. The police had checked the location of the changing room and the detailed description that PHL had given was wrong. She had said a clothes hook had been broken and there was no evidence of any hooks having been broken.
49. The police also spoke to children PHL had mentioned and they were all very strongly denying the allegations. They had been present when PHL had allegedly been abused, or had been named by PHL as having been abused, but all had provided counter statements to the police.
50. It all made me very uncomfortable because PHL had insisted for a long time during the interview that she had not been lying but the evidence that was presented by the police was absolutely overwhelming.
51. Eventually PHL agreed she had not told the truth and a retraction statement was then signed by PHL. I don't remember anyone ever asking PHL why it was she made up the allegations and I don't remember her saying anything to me about that either.

Outcome

52. My feeling, even although PHL had given a signed retraction statement, was that something had happened at that school. I felt she had taken the opportunity to highlight that something had been going on but that she had taken the wrong route to highlight it.
53. It was the combination of PHL's insistence during the first two interviews and then during the retraction interview and my own discomfort in relation to the culture at the school. That had also been commented on by other professionals, like Martin Henry and the Care Inspectorate inspector. The parents also said that there was a bullying culture at the school and that they had concerns about the way in which children were being treated
54. PHL chose to make very serious allegations, and against some people who may not have committed any offences. I think, with the inspection teams being in the school at the time, it would have been a better option for her to talk to those inspection teams about the real experiences that she was having.
55. Perhaps she had embellished it or perhaps it wasn't even things that had happened to her. She might have wanted to highlight the general picture in that school, and the general approach towards pupils.
56. I felt intimidated going into that school, so I wonder what it might have felt like for a child or a young person to be in that environment. I realise they were deaf children, and that voices would be raised, but it was the way pupils were being addressed, in the corridor and the way they were being dealt with by the teaching staff.
57. Subsequent to PHL making her allegations, I got to know that a couple of other pupils, at Donaldson's, made allegations of abuse. I wasn't involved in those investigations but I understand that on the back of PHL's allegations, when the police were going into the school to investigate, a further few pupils made allegations of abuse. They were not linked to PHL's allegations, they were separate.

58. I knew of that through my work within the social work department but also through articles in the press. There was press coverage about PHL's allegations, and it subsequently being wrong, but there was also coverage about other pupils having made allegations. [REDACTED]
59. I continued weekly family contact with [REDACTED], and visited him, and PHL, at their home. I then discovered that she was being ostracised in the school. Teaching staff were very angry with her, which is perhaps understandable to an extent, but it got to the point where people weren't talking to her and were excluding her. She became very unhappy and was refusing to go back to the school.
60. PHL didn't think it was possible for her to be in that school. It actually reached the stage where I was in contact with a female inspector from the Care Commission. I think it was Laurie Davidson, who had been liaising with the education department, to try and make a case to have PHL moved to a school in Glasgow. The only other school in Scotland that can provide for deaf children.
61. Basically PHL was told she would just have to get on with it and that she was staying at Donaldson's in Edinburgh. My feeling, at the time, was that the way PHL was being treated, being forced to remain in a situation she was finding unbearable, would have stopped other children from coming forward.
62. PHL's mum and dad were very upset about the retraction statement as they also felt there would have been some truth in it. They were very supportive of PHL as they did not fully believe the retraction, and felt she was being treated very harshly and should be believed. They were very keen to let me know that things were believed to be going on in the school, and that people knew that, but no one was speaking up.
63. PHL's parents felt the deaf community had pulled together to keep it a secret. They felt that there was the culture of secrecy at the school and that throughout that period, their experience of Donaldson's was that of a bullying school.

64. I only maintained family contact with the [REDACTED] for a short period of time after. I think the case was then closed in 1998. I was then moved to another part of the team. As the risk came from outwith the family home, social work would not remain involved and it would have been a criminal investigation only.
65. I don't think I ever spoke to [REDACTED] about the allegations PHL made against the teachers at the school.
66. In relation to the allegations against [REDACTED], I don't think anything was ever done about it. It was all overtaken by events surrounding PHL's allegations against the teachers at the school. I have no memory of following up with PHL and bringing it to a conclusion other than trying to negotiate a change of school for her. It was as if once the retraction statement was signed that was my involvement with her over.

Lessons to be learned

67. I was subsequently Joint Interview trained and looking back now, I can say that I would not have gone out to those interviews without being Joint Interview trained. It certainly wasn't ideal, for two people who were not Joint Interview trained, to take a statement like that.
68. I was sent out, because we didn't expect what was going to happen. Following joint interview training, my questioning style would have been different but I can't remember the exact questions now, to pinpoint what I would have done differently.
69. I'm not sure I was entirely vocal about my concerns, that there may still have been something going on at Donaldson's school. I was a fairly newly qualified social worker with a line manager that wasn't as supportive as I would have liked her to be.
70. My line manager described PHL as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Basically anything PHL was going to say after that wasn't going to be believed.

Final Comments

71. I believe the notes I took from the interviews I attended may not exist anymore. They would have gone to the council archives but it may be that they've since been destroyed due to the passage of time. Perhaps the police have notes or copies of their statements.
72. Before I went into social work I joined Childline as a volunteer and I got a slightly different perspective on child protection and how children disclose. I've always felt uncomfortable with PHL's allegations and I'll never know if anything happened to her but I was always left with the feeling she was trying to tell us something.
73. Whether it was about her or other pupils we may never know but I couldn't just shelve it and say she was making it up. That was my main concern and I have carried those concerns since. I just don't think I ever actually raised them.
74. 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.....23/9/19.....