Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

KEQ

Support person present: Yes

1. My full name is KEQ and my date of birth is 1958. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

2. I contacted the Inquiry after I saw a programme made by the BBC about Lagarie House in Rhu. I contacted the BBC reporter and he told me to contact the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

3. I was born in Kirkcaldy, and was the youngest of seven siblings in our family. My dad was and my mum was . My oldest brother was , then there was , she died from cancer, then , , , and myself.

4. My dad was a sailor in the merchant navy and he drowned when his boat went down in 1959. I was only six months old at the time but I've since been told my mother wished I had drowned at birth. That's why I hate my mother, I don't even know if she's still alive.

5. As a kid, life was terrible for me at home, I wasn't close to any of my family. When I was growing up I used to get picked on and battered by my brothers. , and would all pick on me, hit me and batter me. That was just because I was the youngest that was it. My life's been crap.

6. I was picked on all the time and my mother didn't want me. That's a hard thing to say. I kept running away from home because of that. My life's not been good, I've had some difficult times.

7. I was actually put in a children's home in Aberdeen because of all my running away. They couldn't control me in there so I was then moved to another place in Edinburgh. Those two places were both after I'd been to Lagarie House.

8. I remember when I was in Kirkcaldy I went to Dunnikier primary school and then Balwearie high school. I never really went to school though, I was always away fishing.

Lagarie House, Rhu, Dumbartonshire

General

9. I went to Lagarie House every year for about six weeks through the [redacted]. I first went when I was about four and I must have been about ten or eleven when I stopped going. I hated going there. It was called Lagarie but all the kids called it Rhu.

10. I can't remember if my older brothers and sisters were there as well, but I know [redacted] was there. We were always kept apart for some strange reason.

Routine at Lagarie House

General

11. I remember when you went in the drive there were big rhododendron bushes at the front and then you drove round a bend and there was the building. It was a nice building, it was massive, but what went on inside wasn't nice. I've a lot of memories of that place, but they're all bad.

12. It was run by the British Sailors Society but a matron was there who was in charge. I can't remember her name.

13. There was quite a few other staff there. I remember one who I used to plead with to get me out of there. She used to cuddle me all the time and she would say she couldn't take me out. I can't remember her name either. If I had photos I could pick them all out, especially the matron.

14. I don't know how many staff were there. I don't know if they stayed there or not. When we got put up the stair at night, we didn't see anyone. We heard them but I don't know who was staying there.

15. I think there would be about twenty odd kids in there at that time. They were about my age, up to about seven or eight. It was boys and girls and some were just there for the [redacted] like me, but there were others who were there all year round.

16. I remember a pal of mine from there, [redacted]. He was my age and was there all year round. I'd like to meet him again. I used to call him [redacted]. I can't remember his surname.

17. There were three or four floors at Lagarie. On the ground floor you had the dining room, the playroom and TV room, the bathrooms and the matrons office. I remember the matrons office had dark panelling on the walls as my head got smashed off it quite a few times.

18. It was all bedrooms and dormitories on the first, second and third floors. I think there were rooms and dormitories. There was maybe six or eight beds in each dorm. To be honest, I'm not sure, but the boys and girls were all in separate dorms.

19. There was a tower at the front of the building. We used to call it the small tower and I still have nightmares about that tower.

First day

20. On my first day at Lagarie, I went with my mum and my sister, [redacted]. We got there and my mum said bye and she was away. I can't remember any of the rest of my siblings being there.

21. I remember we got a brown tag with our name on it and that was tied to your jacket.

22. I remember the matron, she was about forty or something. She was heavy built. She had dark hair and she sometimes wore specs. She was a nightmare. She's dead now, which is unfortunate, as there's a few things I'd like to say to her.

23. SNR [redacted] was there every year I was there, except one. One year there was SNR [redacted], perhaps the usual one was [redacted]. [redacted] was definitely called KER [redacted]. I remember she had relatives that came from Kirkcaldy. She wasn't as bad but she would still give you a slap.

Mornings and bedtime

24. The children would all get woken in the morning by whoever was on duty, it could be matron or another member of staff. They would come and wake us up and we'd get washed, dressed go down for breakfast and be outside playing.

25. We would go back in at lunchtime and wash our hands and faces before lunch. Then after lunch we were back outside again. I got on well with all the other kids, I never had any hassle with any of them. It was just the matron.

26. After tea, we would go and get a bath or shower and then we would sit and watch TV until it was time to go to bed. Bedtime was about eight o'clock. Staff would take you up and it was into bed, settle down and lights out. If there was any noise, matron would come up and you would get it.

27. At night you used to hear people walking along the fire escape and down the metal stairs. It was adult footsteps, not kids. Who were they and what were they doing? That happened most weeks, sometimes two or three times a week. I think all the boys were too scared to talk about it. It was never spoken about by any of us.

28. The fire escape stairs came right along the front and zig zagged down past every room, so, whoever it was, could have got in to any of the bedrooms. I was terrified by that and just stayed in bed.

Mealtimes/Food

29. All the children had breakfast together in the dining room. We could sit wherever we wanted. There were cooks who made all the food and brought it to the tables. We all had the same food, but matron she had big joints of beef.

30. I remember we had porridge for breakfast every day and it was horrible and lumpy. Matron was usually in her office then, but there were staff there to help clear up and then we would go outside to play.

31. If you didn't like the food and didn't eat it, then you didn't eat, that was it. The food was put out and you got nothing else if you didn't like it. No one was force fed or anything like that.

32. I can't really remember much more about the food, just the porridge. If it was a nice day we sometimes had a picnic outside on the grass. There was a slope and we would roll down it, but if we got dirty, we would get a slap from matron.

Washing / bathing

33. We washed in the toilets and bathrooms downstairs on the ground floor. There were lots of sinks, baths and showers. Boys and girls would all have showers or baths on our own but they were supervised. It was different staff that would supervise us, it just depended who was on duty.

34. Sometimes it was even the matron and if you weren't quick enough in getting out the shower she would pull you out the shower, all wet, and smack you on the backside with an open hand. That was sore and it stung.

35. When I was very young some of the older kids would give you a hand getting washed and showered because if you weren't quick in getting dressed the matron would be up and you didn't want to meet her or you'd get a slap.

Leisure

36. I remember there was this big brick doll's house outside. It had a wasps nest in it and I would upset the nest every day. I got a hiding for that as well. The matron pulled me in and slapped me in the face and on back for that.

37. We had a sand pit, a roundabout, a slide, two big rocking horses and a big blue car, that I used to love. All the toys were kept in a big summer house they had outside. I think the toys were all provided by the British Sailors Society.

38. We also had a TV room, we were in there most nights in our jammies, until about eight o'clock. We would watch cartoons.

Trips

39. We didn't go on any trips or outings at all. We had a minibus but the furthest I remember going was the beach across the road. I actually don't remember ever going anywhere in that minibus.

School

40. I was only at Lagarie during the [redacted] holidays, so there was never any schooling.

Clothing / uniform

41. When [redacted] and I arrived at Lagarie, the staff took our own clothes from us and gave us shorts and t-shirts. It wasn't a uniform just coloured shorts and t-shirts. I don't think they were new. We got our own clothes back when we went home.

Healthcare

42. I didn't see a doctor or any nurse in all the times I was at Lagarie House. I did get beatings and a kicking from the matron once that really hurt my ribs, but I was never seen by a doctor or anyone. I was just sent to my bed.

Birthdays and Christmas

43. I would have been at Lagarie over my birthday but I don't ever remember getting a cake or having my birthday acknowledged in any way. I don't remember ever celebrating a birthday as a child, I think the first time was with my wife, [redacted].

Visits / Inspections

44. I didn't get any visits from my family when I was at Lagarie. When I was taken there, that was it until they came back to get me.

45. If other children had visitors they were never allowed up the stairs. Visitors would sit with their children in the TV room or sit outside on the grass.

46. The matron would bring them ice-cream on these fancy dishes, she was a completely different person when other people were about.

47. Whenever I arrived there, the matron would come out and give me a cuddle in front of my mother. When my mum came back to get me she was the same, totally different from the evil woman we saw.

48. I couldn't tell you if people inspected the place. I know there were other people used to come in, but who they were I don't know. They didn't speak to us, we were outside playing or watching TV.

Bedwetting

49. There were toilets on every floor and you were allowed to go to the toilet during the night but if you wet the bed you would regret it in the morning. I wet the bed in Lagarie but I never wet the bed at home.

50. Staff went round the beds in the morning. If anybody was wet, or their bed was wet, the staff would send the child to see matron in her office. The bed wouldn't get stripped then, you would have to get back in it that night as the beds were only changed every week.

51. You didn't get to change your pyjamas either, so you would just take somebody else's. The rooms used to smell because the sheets weren't getting changed.

52. The routine was that you would be sent to see the matron if you wet the bed. Every staff member did that. They told you to go and report to matron and tell her you had wet the bed.

53. You would go down and stand outside her office until she told you to get in. You would tell her you had wet the bed and she would tell you to stand there. She would then hit the side of your face with her hand.

54. There was never anyone there to give you any help if you wet the bed. Once you were up the stairs at night that was you, until the next morning. You were scared to get out your bed.

Abuse at Lagarie House

Matron

55. The TV room was down the stairs and it had a kind of stage. The matron would sit on that stage in her big chair, eating her roast beef and and if you ever looked at her the wrong way she would hit you, knocking you half way across the room.

56. She sat up there and all the kids would sit on the floor. The TV was up there as well, so she was watching the kids. If you looked at her the wrong way, she would hit you with the back of her hand and that was sore. She was wicked and evil, I hated that woman. I hated that place.

57. I used to plead with one of the cleaners to get me out of there. I remember there were steps at the backdoor, that led to the laundry area and washing lines. At the side there were these rocks, I remember they were the shape of a jeep and I would sit there with that lady. She had long blonde curly hair and she was brilliant. She was there every day and she would see me sitting crying and come over and cuddle me. I would sit with her saying I didn't want to be there, I wanted out of there. She was the only staff member who was kind to me. She used to say I couldn't go and that she couldn't take me out.

58. If you weren't quick enough at getting dressed in the mornings, matron would knock you about. I've had some beatings from her for things like that, or for not getting in for breakfast quick enough. She would hit me with her hands, on the face, on the legs, any place, she even kicked me.

59. I had my ribs kicked in by her once. My ribs still stick out where that happened. I was put to my bed and nobody was allowed to come and see me. It was such an evil place.

60. If she caught you running in the corridors, she would slap you. She would grab you, put you against the wall and slap you. That could happen three or four times a day, to me and to others. Everyone was treated the same.

61. Matron's room was just across from the big bathroom area where we washed and showered. Another of her punishments, was to give you a cold bath and stick carbolic soap in your mouth. That happened to me a few times, and it happened to other kids too. Every day you heard kids screaming.

62. It could be for anything, she would take you out the TV room, hit you and slap you and then stick you in a cold bath. She would strip you naked and throw you in the bath. She'd keep you in for a couple of minutes and she would stand over you and hold you in. Then she would stick the carbolic soap in your mouth. She would be shouting at you to stop crying. The first time that happened I was only about four or five.

63. That happened all the time, not just to me. It happened to other kids as well. It happened to me every year I went there.

64. Matron's office had dark panelling. The panelling only went so far up, then it was glass at the top. I was knocked off the panelling a few times. I would get taken down to matron's office by a member of staff and they would just leave me there. I would stand there until matron shouted me in. When I went in I had to tell her why I had been sent down. I knew I was going to get punished.

65. She would hit me and slap me and smash my head off the panelling in that room. I had a bleeding nose and a bleeding lip, it was unbelievable. Sometimes it could be for nothing, sometimes it cold be for running, or being late or wetting the bed.

The gardener

66. When I was there in about my third year, I broke the head off one of the rocking horses and chucked it in the bushes. The matron found out about it and I got a beating from her for that.

67. The next day, the gardener told me I was to go with him to fix the horse. I only knew him as the gardener, I didn't know his name or what he did at Lagarie House. He

took me into his shed and abused me. I was six years old. I don't want to go into detail about it, but it was sexual and there was penetration.

68. The gardener abused me about four of five times in that shed. Every [redacted] after that until I stopped going. He also came up to my bedroom and took me out my bed and up to the small tower. That happened twice and he abused me there. That's why I hate that room and that's why I have my nightmares.

69. I can't remember there being any staff monitoring the rooms at night. There was probably someone on the ground floor but I can't remember.

70. I didn't have any marks or bruises that could be seen by other people. Not from the gardener or the matron. She was very clever and made us wear long jumpers and trousers if we ever had any bruises. She would also tell other staff that, whoever it was, had fallen over or something like that. I had that a few times.

71. The gardener was about thirty years old, he wore grey dungarees and he always wore a plain leather belt with them. He was tall and he had a Scottish accent. I've seen pictures of him and the matron, on the BBC programme I watched online, and I recognised both of them. I don't know if he was named as an abuser but I saw him and I recognised him.

Reporting of abuse at Lagarie House

72. The gardener said to me that if I ever told anybody I would never see my mother again. I thought he meant that I would be kept there. I was terrified.

73. I don't know if he took any other children into the shed. Nobody would have spoken about those kind of things in Lagarie. At the time I didn't speak about it, I didn't tell my mum or any of my brothers or sisters. I didn't hear anyone else speak about it either.

74. When I was a bit older, I did tell my older brother, [redacted], about it and he abused me as well. I was about ten. When [redacted] died, I jumped into my car and drove straight to the morgue in Dunfermline to make sure he was actually dead.

Reporting of abuse to the police

75. I've never made any report to the police about any of the abuse I suffered. I went on to stay with my older sister, [redacted], for a few years after being in the home in Edinburgh. I couldn't speak to her about anything. I couldn't speak to anybody about it.

Leaving Lagarie House

76. I stopped going to Lagarie when I was about eleven. It was a horrible place, but living at home wasn't great either.

77. I had a terrible relationship with my mum and [redacted] abused me. I wasn't treated like my brothers and sisters because my mum didn't want me so I kept running away from home. I didn't go to school, I just went away fishing with my uncles and cousins in Kirkcaldy.

78. I was staying away overnight in fields or just any place I could sleep. I stayed with pals in Kirkcaldy and I would get lifted by the police and taken back. I wouldn't speak to the police, I didn't like them either as they were the ones taking me back.

79. I went to Oakbank School when I was about twelve. There was talk about me going to St. Olives in Kirkcaldy but I would have walked out of there, so they decided to put me further away.

80. I was placed at Oakbank by a Children's Panel, it was because of my running away. I remember a Mr Shepherd was one of my social workers, he was from Kirkcaldy.

There was a woman as well, Mrs Flavel, she was a teacher and she was on the Children's Panel. They were the two that took me to Edinburgh when I left Oakbank.

81. The Children's Panel did ask me why I kept running away from home but I didn't answer them. I was stubborn. I didn't want to talk about my past, I was scared so I wasn't interested in what they were saying to me.

82. They eventually asked me if I wanted to end up in a home and I said yes. That's how I ended up going to Oakbank in Aberdeen.

Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen

General

83. I loved it at Oakbank, it was brilliant. I was away from the family so I didn't get the beatings. I didn't want to come home. Even when it was time for me to come out and go home, I didn't want to.

84. I was there for about two years. It was a school for kids that had been misbehaving. It was a mixture of boys and girls and the ages were from about ten upwards. I remember I did get schooling within the place.

85. They didn't really discipline you at Oakbank. They would keep you in your room but they didn't beat me up like my brothers did at home. It was a place I had no option about, but I did like it there.

86. They couldn't control me at Oakbank and I kept getting into trouble. I was getting too old anyway so I was moved to Edinburgh.

Howdenhall Children's Centre, Edinburgh

General

87. I was moved to an assessment centre in Edinburgh, at Howdenhall, it was straight across the road from the crematorium.

88. I was at Howdenhall for about two or three years, until I was sixteen. After that I just looked after myself.

89. Howdenhall was secure like a prison, but everything was very fair. There were a lot of wild kids in there and there were always fights. If you got into trouble or went fighting with other guys that were there, they would put you in a room until you had calmed down.

90. I did get into fights and I was put in the room quite a bit. There was a reinforced glass window in it and I kicked that out one day. I was older at Howdenhall and I was wilder. I didn't care about anything.

Life after being in care

91. I was sixteen when I came out of Howdenhall and I went to stay with my older sister, [redacted]. She was in Kirkcaldy. I got on great with [redacted] and I stayed with her for a couple of years.

92. I didn't go to high school, I used to head that way in the morning, but I never ended up there, I would head off fishing. They tried, at Oakbank and at Howdenhall, but I wasn't interested. They basically calmed you down and tried to straighten you out.

93. I was a butchers apprentice for a while but I got the sack. I was a bit off the rails I suppose. I got a couple of other jobs after that, I was a forklift driver and I worked in the tanning industry in Kinghorn for a few years. Eventually I moved out of [redacted]'s and I got a flat in Kirkcaldy. [redacted] died of cancer after I met my wife, [redacted].

94. I had a friend who was a chef on a ship and he persuaded me to start working off-shore. I couldn't boil a kettle but he got me out and taught me everything. I became second chef on a ship and I loved it. That's when I met [redacted], she was involved in cleaning a ship I was working on.

95. I started seeing [redacted]. I sold my flat and moved in with her and we got married. We've been married now for 25 years.

96. I'm now a long distance lorry driver but I'm stuck in the office at the moment because of the aneurism in my head. That first happened about ten years ago, I was in hospital for about three days, but it disappeared.

97. I've had regular scans since then and now it's back. If I watch what I'm doing I'm okay, so I need to keep calm as stress and anxiety can affect me. That's not easy. DVLA took my licence from me for a year, which was why I was moved to work in the office, but I do have my licence back now.

Impact

98. I still have nightmares about the small tower at Lagarie House. In my nightmares I'm walking up the stairs towards the door and I have to wake myself up before I get to the top and that door opens. I wake up sweating, it's horrible.

99. My older brother [redacted] was always picking on me when he came home from leave in the army. We were in the Station Hotel in Kirkcaldy one night, when he was home on leave, and he picked on me in there. That was the last time he picked on me as I lifted up a bar stool and hit him across the back of the head.

100. I'm very deep, I don't talk to people, and I think that's what my problem is, I don't talk. I can go for weeks without saying a word to [redacted]. For a few years of our marriage, I was not a nice person. I've been aggressive, not physically towards

people or towards [redacted], but I'm moody and I can just blow up. We've nearly split up a few times because of the way I am. None of that's fair on [redacted].

101. My whole life I've been shut down and I keep myself to myself. I'm even like that at work. If anyone comes and sits next to me, I push them away. I hate people coming near to me, I hate meeting people. I think it all stems from my time in Lagarie House.

102. I've always been very protective towards my two step daughters ever since [redacted] and me got together. They were nine and eleven at the time. Now I'm the same with my grandchildren, they're four, seven and thirteen now.

103. My ribs stick out from where the matron kicked me, but that doesn't cause me any problems.

104. I did have a drink problem and I'd say I was nearly an alcoholic when I met [redacted]. She wouldn't tolerate that because her dad was an alcoholic. It was the drink or [redacted], so I stopped drinking like that.

Treatment / support

105. I've never had any kind of counselling. I didn't get anything like that at Oakbank or Howdenhall either. I think I'm a bit old for it now but I suppose it's something I could consider.

106. I don't speak about my time in care and then when the programme was on the TV about Lagarie House, I did finally talk to [redacted]. I told her what had happened in the past and I feel, since I've done that, things haven't been as bad.

107. I did make contact with Future Pathways and I was referred to a doctor for an assessment. I had that assessment over the phone a few weeks ago. That lasted about an hour and the woman I spoke to told me I had Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder. I'm still waiting to hear from them about getting some counselling in Dundee.

Records

108. I haven't asked the British Sailor's Society for any of my records. I don't know what they would have. I couldn't tell you what records there were. I only ever saw the matron writing, she was always writing stuff in her office.

109. I intend contacting the British Sailor's Society again and obtaining whatever records I can from them. I am interested in knowing what records they actually have.

Lessons to be learned

110. More staff in Lagarie would perhaps have prevented things happening. It was not a nice place and I'll never forget it. That can't happen again.

111. Having someone to talk to, someone you could trust, that would have helped and having more external involvement. The matron was always different when people were visiting, so perhaps, regular visits or inspections would have helped. Matron definitely ruled the roost, and I don't think she was answerable to anyone.

112. There was no contact with the social work at Lagarie, I don't know if there should have been. There was certainly no contact with Mr Shepherd after he dropped me off at Howdenhall. That was it, I was a nobody and I didn't receive support.

113. There was never any preparation for life when I left Howdenhall. I was just dropped off at Kirkcaldy.

Other information

114. After I saw the programme on Lagarie on the BBC, I contacted the reporter, Mark Daly. He then told me to contact the Inquiry and the British Sailors Society.

115. I did contact the British Sailors Society, to advise them of my situation, and they wrote back and confirmed Lagarie House was to be subject of an investigation by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. They also said a number of survivors from Lagarie House had been in touch with them.

116. The British Sailors Society thanked me for getting in touch, as it was helping them get an understanding about what happened at Lagarie House. They also said they regretted that any child had been abused and they apologised for any abuse that was suffered by children who were in their care at the time. They also offered to finance counselling for me.

117. 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... KEQ [redacted] .....

Dated.....2/10/19.....