

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

JDW

Support person present: No.

1. My name is JDW. I have also been known as JDW, JDW, JDW and JDW. My date of birth is 1948. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Background

2. I am not sure if I had any qualifications when I started working at Merkland Children's Home. I started as housemother, then SNR. I can't remember my job title as SNR. It was just a name that was given to me by Peter Harley. I can't remember having any responsibility. Peter Harley dealt with everything.

### Merkland Children's Home, Moffat

3. Merkland Children's Home was in Moffat, Scotland. It was a children's home. My first impression of Merkland was that it was a big house.
4. I have been asked to comment on and describe the culture within Merkland. It was my first time in a children's home, so I've nothing to compare it with. It seemed normal.
5. I have been asked to describe the attitude of staff towards children in the institution and the type of relationship which existed between staff and the children. They all

seemed fine, that I can remember. My relationships with the children at Merkland were good.

*My time at Merkland Children's Home*

6. I started at Merkland as housemother, then SNR I was given the job by Peter Harley and PLS. I have been asked what my day to duties and chores were as housemother. Housemother, that was just a name. I think my duty was to oversee daily tasks, such as if people got up, went to bed, had food, and ate. I have been asked to describe a typical day as a housemother. In my head, a typical day was the children got up, went to school, came home, had food, had their own time, then went to bed. At the weekend, what I can remember is that the children got up and had their own time, the only difference was there was no school. I can't remember having any responsibility.
7. I have been asked what process was followed when I was recruited, including the provision of references, probation, and any prerequisites for the role. There was none that I can remember.
8. I have been asked to describe my day to day duties and chores as SNR and to describe a typical day as SNR. I did not really have any duties. Peter Harley managed everything, I thought that was how it was supposed to be at the time. I knew nothing different. I have been asked whether my duties as SNR changed at the weekend. I did not really have any weekend duties. Peter Harley managed everything, I thought that was how it was supposed to be at the time. I knew nothing different. Peter Harley dealt with everything, I just done what I was told to do.
9. I have been asked what involvement I had with the day to day activities in Merkland, as housemother. Regarding bathing and showering, nothing at all. What I can remember was giving general support, it was like with my children, I made sure they had food, encouraged them to be active, talked, normal stuff. Peter Harley dealt with everything, I just done what I was told to do.

10. I have been asked what involvement I had with the day to day activities in Merkland, as [SNR] Peter Harley dealt with everything, I just done what I was told to do.
11. I have been asked to describe my day to day contact with the children as housemother and as [SNR], when I saw the children and whether I supervised them at different points in the day. The children got up, had breakfast, and went to school. They were all very independent.
12. I have been asked whether, in my day to day contact with the children, any of them showed obvious signs of abuse such as marked bruising, unusual levels of distress, disruptive behaviour, or behaviour which was quiet or withdrawn. Like I have stated many time, I had no idea what Peter Harley was doing, I did not hear or see anything. Looking back, I put this down to the way he treated me [redacted] negative controlling, abusive, and so on.
13. My line manager was [redacted] Peter Harley.
14. I have been asked what training, including induction training, was provided or arranged by the institution for my different positions. I can't remember as it was over forty years ago.

*Structure and recruitment of staff*

15. I have been asked what the staffing structure was. I did not deal with this.
16. [redacted] Peter Harley was in charge.
17. Peter Harley's leadership style was controlling.
18. I have been asked whether I was involved in the recruitment of staff in the institution. I don't think so. I have no knowledge of recruitment policy and recruitment practices. I did not deal with this.

19. I have been asked whether volunteers worked in Merkland and the processes for assessing and vetting them before they started work with the children. I did not deal with this.
20. I have been asked to what extent references were obtained from former places of work and whether referees were spoken to. I did not deal with this.
21. I have been asked whether I managed others or had managerial responsibility at Merkland. I did not deal with this.

*Training*

22. I did not deal with either the training or personal development of staff or others.
23. I did not deal with training or personal development policies, or how in practice these matters were implemented.

*Supervision/appraisal/staff evaluation*

24. I did not deal with the supervision of staff, staff appraisal, or staff evaluation.
25. I did not deal with Merkland's policy in relation to the supervision of staff, staff appraisal, or staff evaluation.
26. I did not deal with supervision of volunteers by permanent staff, the nature of the supervision, or how the supervision was recorded.

*Policy*

27. I did not deal with policy in relation to the care, including residential care, of children.

### *Strategic Planning*

28. I did not deal with strategic planning in relation to Merkland. I did not deal with Merkland's strategic approach.

### *Children*

29. I did not deal with the placing of children at Merkland or with assessments carried out before a child was placed in Merkland. I did not deal with what the staff did with the results of any such assessments.
30. I am not sure how long children tended to stay at Merkland.
31. I can't remember how many children were there, how many were boys and how many were girls, or what the age range was.
32. I can't remember what the ratio of children to staff or adults was.
33. I have been asked what kind of food the children were provided with and what happened if children did not like the food. We had a cook, they dealt with that.
34. I have been asked what the sleeping arrangements were for the children. There were different bedrooms.
35. The children all appeared to wash and shower, I can't remember exactly the times.
36. Leisure time was spent like normal children, out with friends and activities on site.
37. I did not deal with organised trips, day trips, holidays, or informal trips.
38. I did not deal with what volunteers did with the children.
39. Children were schooled at local schools.

40. I have been asked who dealt with any health problems the children had, who managed and administered medication, whether any of the children took medication designed to manage or control their behaviour, whether parents or others with parental responsibilities and rights were asked to consent to the administration of medication, and how this was recorded. I did not deal with this.
41. I have been asked whether children did manual work, for example, polishing floors, laundry work. I did not deal with this.
42. I did not deal with visitors to Merkland, vetting of visitors, or the taking of children out of Merkland by visitors.
43. I did not deal with professionals, for example, social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists, visiting the children. I did not deal with any reports provided by them or recommendations being implemented.
44. I did not deal with any review carried out by Merkland or others, for example, a local authority, of children's continued residence in Merkland.
45. I did not deal with the process for discharge of children leaving Merkland.
46. I did not deal with help or support given by Merkland or any other body when children were leaving or just after they left.

*Living arrangements*

47. [REDACTED] lived on the top floor of Merkland, it was like a flat.
48. Staff and children had access to the children's residential areas. I have been asked who was responsible for the children's residential areas overnight. I did not deal with this.

*Discipline and punishment*

49. I did not deal with how or by whom children were disciplined and punished in Merkland.
50. I have been asked whether there was any formal policy or code of conduct in relation to discipline and punishment and, if there was a policy, how were both staff and children at the institution aware of it, and how it was intended to apply in practice. I did not deal with this.
51. I have been asked to what extent discipline was the responsibility of more senior child residents, and if so, who supervised their behaviour. I did not deal with this.
52. I have been asked what type of behaviour resulted in discipline or punishment. I did not deal with this.
53. I did not deal with the administering of discipline for things that were not permitted. Peter Harley administered discipline to the children. I did not deal with the form which discipline took.
54. I have been asked whether children were physically disciplined or punished. I did not deal with this. I have been asked whether children were segregated from other children for periods of time as punishment. I did not deal with this.
55. I did not discipline children.
56. I did not deal with keeping a record or punishment book of when children were disciplined or punished, Peter Harley did.

*Restraint*

57. I have been asked if restraint was used on children during my time at Merkland. Not by me, I did not see anything.

58. I have been asked whether children were removed from other children or placed in a room alone. Not by me, I was not aware of anything.
59. Medication was not administered by me as a means of restraining or sedating or calming a child and I was not aware of anything.
60. I did not restrain children.
61. I did not deal with the policies, whether written or unwritten, and practices relating to restraint in Merkland. I have been asked how these policies changed over time. Not by me, I was not aware.
62. I have been asked whether I saw excessive restraint being used on children at Merkland. Not by me, I was not aware.

*Concerns about the institution*

63. I have been asked whether Merkland was ever the subject of concern, within the institution itself or to any external body or agency, or any other person, because of the way in which children were treated. Not by me, I was not aware.
64. If Merkland was the subject of concern, I have been asked to provide details of the nature of the concerns, any individuals who were the subject of concern, and the institution's response. Not by me, I was not aware.
65. I did not have dealings with making the parents of the children aware of such concerns.

*Reporting of complaints/concerns*

66. I have been asked whether, if any child in the institution, or another person on their behalf, wished to make a complaint or report a concern, there was a complaints or reporting process in place. I did not have dealings with this.

67. I have been asked, if Merkland had such a policy, to tell the Inquiry about it, and asked to what extent that process was used. I did not have dealings with this.
68. I have been asked, if Merkland did not have such a policy, were complaints nevertheless received. I did not have dealings with this.
69. I did not have dealings with receiving any complaints of abuse.
70. I did not have dealings with the recording of complaints.

*Trusted adult/confidante*

71. I have been asked whether there was any person in the institution, or outside of it, to whom a child could speak about any worries they had, including concerns about the conduct or behaviour of other children, staff or others, towards them. I believe they could talk with their social worker.
72. I have been asked to give details about this practice, including if and how practice changed over time. I did not have dealings with this.
73. I have been asked whether children raised concerns in this way and whether any child raised such concerns with me. I did not have dealings with this.

*Abuse*

74. I have no knowledge of Merkland having a definition of 'abuse' that it applied in relation to the treatment of children at Merkland.
75. I have been asked, if Merkland had such a definition, to give as much detail about what, in the eyes of Merkland, would constitute abuse of children in its care, when the definition was introduced, and whether it ever changed. I had no knowledge of this at the time.

76. I have been asked, if there was a definition, how that definition was communicated and explained to those working in the institution. I had no knowledge of this at the time.
77. I have been asked whether I saw behaviour that I considered to be abuse of any kind taking place at Merkland and, if I did, to provide as much detail as possible. I had no knowledge of this at the time.
78. I have been asked whether children ever reported abuse to me and, if they did, to provide as much detail as possible. I had no knowledge of this at the time.
79. I have been asked whether, looking back, I can be confident that, if any child was being abused or illtreated, it would have come to light at or around the time it was occurring. I had no knowledge of this at the time.
80. I have been asked if I can be confident that abuse or ill treatment would have come to light at the time it was occurring, why can I be confident and, if I cannot be confident, why not. I had no knowledge of this at the time.
81. I have been asked whether abuse could have happened in Merkland and gone undetected during my time there. Not by me, I was not aware.

*Child protection arrangements*

82. I did not deal with staff, including managerial staff, being given guidance and instruction on how children in their care in the institution should be treated, cared for and protected against abuse, ill-treatment or inappropriate behaviour towards them, whether from staff, other adults, or other children. Peter Harley did.
83. I did not deal with giving guidance and instruction on how to handle, and respond to, reports of abuse or ill-treatment of children by staff, other adults, or other children. Peter Harley did.

84. I have been asked how much autonomy or discretion was given to staff and other adults, including managerial staff, in relation to these matters. I did not deal with this, Peter Harley did.
85. I have been asked what child protection arrangements were in place to reduce the likelihood of abuse, ill-treatment, or inappropriate conduct by staff, or other adults, towards children at Merkland. I did not deal with this, Peter Harley did.
86. I have been asked to give as much detail as possible, and whether I thought such arrangements worked. I did not deal with this.

*External monitoring*

87. I have been asked whether I was aware of inspectors or other officials visiting Merkland, whether they spoke to children, individually or in a group, whether staff or other adults were present, if they spoke to me, or gave feedback. I did not deal with this.

*Record-keeping*

88. I have been asked about records in general at Merkland, during my time there. Peter Harley dealt with records, I really can't remember, it was over forty years ago.
89. I have been asked whether I can comment on the historical position as regards record-keeping, from what I saw on taking up my position at Merkland and whether there was an existing policy on record-keeping. I did not deal with this.
90. I can't remember what the quality was of records I had to use.
91. I have asked whether records provided adequate information about how children had been treated in practice, and whether children had been reporting what they considered to be abuse, ill-treatment or inappropriate conduct. Peter Harley dealt with this, I really can't remember, it was over forty years ago.

### **Allegations of abuse**

92. I have never been the subject of an allegation of abuse or ill-treatment of a child or children who resided in Merkland when I was there.

### **Investigations into abuse - personal involvement**

93. I have never been involved in any investigation on behalf of Merkland into allegations of abuse or ill-treatment of or into inappropriate behaviour by staff or others towards children.
94. I have been asked, if I was involved in any investigation on behalf of Merkland, to give as much detail as I can about any investigations. I did not deal with any complaints.

### **Reports of abuse and civil claims**

95. I have never been involved in the handling of reports to Merkland by former residents, concerning historical abuse.
96. I have never been involved in the handling of civil claims made against Merkland by former residents, concerning historical abuse. I did not have any complaints made to me.
97. I am not aware of whether Merkland reached any conclusion, in light of such reports, as to the nature and extent of non-recent abuse at the institution.

### **Police investigations/ criminal proceedings**

98. In later years, I became aware of police investigations into alleged abuse at Merkland. I don't know the institution's response.

99. I have been asked whether I have given a statement to the police or the Crown concerning alleged abuse of children cared for at Merkland. The police took a statement at my house when Peter Harley was arrested.
100. I have not given evidence at a trial concerning alleged abuse of children at Merkland.

### **Convicted abusers**

101. I have been asked whether I know if any person who worked at Merkland was convicted of the abuse of a child or children at Merkland. I was not aware at the time.
102. I have been asked whether, at any time, I had any personal dealings with any such person. Not that I can remember.
103. I have been asked, based on such dealings, what I remember about the person, including whether I had any concerns about them, or was made aware of concerns about them made by others. Not that I can remember.
104. I did not deal with how that person was recruited by Merkland or their child care qualifications. I can't remember any child care training before or during their time at the institution. I did not deal with their supervision or monitoring.

### **Leaving Merkland Children's Home**

105. I left because Merkland closed Secondary Institutions - to be published later  
Secondary Institutions - to be published later
106. Peter Harley dealt with references, which I was provided with relating to my time at Merkland.

### **Allegations made about me to the Inquiry**

107. I have been sent several statements and documents by the Inquiry and asked to respond to allegations contained within them. Regarding all the people named in those statements and documents, I have no recollection of them, I have no recollection of punishing anyone, I have never abused anyone, and I deny all allegations.
108. Yes, the passing of time has had an impact on my recollection of what is alleged. I have no idea why people are saying these things, all I can think is that they are trying to blame me for what Peter Harley did. I have never abused a child. I was never aware this was going on. No child or person should be abused. I don't condone any abuse.
109. I am a victim too, Peter Harley abused me, he controlled my life, I lived in fear, he gaslighted me every day, he was controlling, and a manipulator. He [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and threaten me in all kinds of ways. He has made my life hell.
- [REDACTED]
110. I have been sent an extract from a statement given to police by [REDACTED] on 23 November 2009. I can't remember the person called [REDACTED]. I have never asked anyone to give anyone a hiding or hurt anyone.
- [REDACTED]
111. I have been sent an extract from a document which is named 'List of Merkland residents who provided witness statements'. The document refers to a person named [REDACTED]. I have never pulled someone's hair or punched them.

██████ or ██████

112. The extract from the document which named 'List of Merkland residents who provided witness statements also refers to a person named ██████ or ██████. I have not slapped anyone across the face.

FEV ██████

113. I have been sent a statement given to the Inquiry by FEV ██████ and an extract of a statement given by him to the police on 23 March 1995. I did not have any knowledge of what Peter Harley was doing, I have never sat in a room where Peter Harley was abusing a child. I have never asked Peter Harley to pin down a child or abuse a child.

PLB ██████

114. I have been sent a statement given to the Inquiry by PLB ██████. From what I can remember, there was a dishwasher. I can't remember a big Welsh man that worked there, but to be honest my memory is not what it used to be. I have never bullied anyone. I have never asked Peter Harley to abuse any child. I was not aware of what Peter Harley was doing. I have no recollection of ever hitting someone with a screwdriver. I have never hit a child with a slipper. I have never asked anyone to hit anyone nor have I hit anyone.

PLJ ██████

115. I have been sent a statement given to the Inquiry by PLJ ██████. I have never asked Peter Harley to hold down a child. I have never had an affair with anyone.

### **Helping the Inquiry**

116. I have been asked, if I did not see or hear of any abuse while I was at Merkland, can I help the Inquiry to explain how it can be that such allegations of abuse have been

made. [REDACTED] Peter Harley was controlling, abusive verbally and physically towards myself, he gaslighted me every day. I experienced controlling and cohesive behaviour, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

117. I am told that the Inquiry has information to the effect that the experiences of abuse some children had at Merkland has continued to affect them and impact on their lives. I have been asked, if I did not see or hear of any abuse while I was at Merkland, can I help the Inquiry to explain how that can be. [REDACTED] Peter Harley was controlling, abusive verbally and physically towards myself, he gaslighted me every day, I experienced controlling and cohesive behaviour, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

118. I have been asked, what lessons can be learned to protect children in places like Merkland, now and in the future. They must make sure the people involved in the care of others are qualified to do the job and make it mandatory that all homes are checked on a regular basis. Background checks are essential.

**Other information**

119. 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..... JDW [REDACTED] .....

Dated..... 14.02.2026 .....