

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PFN [REDACTED]

Support person present: No

1. My name is PFN [REDACTED] and my maiden name is PFN [REDACTED] which is the name I was known by when in Care. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1958. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Duke Street Hospital in Glasgow and brought up in [REDACTED] in Bridgeton, Glasgow. My dad's name was [REDACTED] and my mum is [REDACTED]. I have two brothers and two sisters who are [REDACTED] who was born in 1960, [REDACTED] who was born in 1968, [REDACTED] who was born in 1970 and [REDACTED] who was born in 1975.
3. Life as a child was fine and I had no qualms about where we were. We didn't have a lot of money but never went without as we had a lot of relatives who lived nearby, including my gran who stayed next door. During those early years it was just me and [REDACTED] who were with our mum and dad.
4. Dad left the army and married mum then became a delivery driver and then a coalman for the area. As a child I would come in from school and played for a while being quiet or go to Glasgow Green and play. I went to John's Street Primary and then to John's Street Secondary both of which were just a walk away and I would walk there with [REDACTED].

5. When you were at primary you got a school medical every so often. During one of my medicals I was weighed and had my eyes and ears checked out. After it I was asked to take a seat before being told they would like me to go on a lovely wee holiday due to how thin I was. I wasn't malnourished or anything, I was just naturally thin. I was quite excited when they suggested I go on a holiday because that was something our family could never afford.
6. Since neither of my sisters had been born at that time I was asked if I wanted to take a friend with me so I chose my friend [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] died a few years ago. Both of our mums were sent a letter about it as they had to give their permission to allow us to go. My mum wasn't sure about letting me go but eventually agreed to it, probably because [REDACTED]'s mum was allowing [REDACTED] to go.
7. I don't know the name of the female who gave me the medical and don't know if she was a doctor or a nurse. She just said the holiday would do me good after she had weighed me. I don't think any welfare or child officers were involved in the decision. I think I was seven years old at the time and it was 1965 or 1966.
8. We were going to Fornethy House in Perth and the day we went I remember it being cold and snowing so I assume it was in the winter. We went to Glasgow Central Station with our mums where we met a woman who took us on the train to Perth. The woman was like a school teacher and we spoke very little on the train. At the time I thought we were going to a place called Abernethy and it was only later I found out it was called Fornethy.

Fornethy House

9. The first thing you saw as you went up the long driveway in Fornethy was a massive amount of huge trees. You went up the drive, turned left and there was a castle type building. It was white/cream in colour and put you in mind of a castle with turrets and huge doors. It was a place for girls only and I think there were between thirty and forty

girls though there could have been more. They were aged between five and ten or eleven.

10. A woman was in charge but I don't recall her name. She was old with white hair, sometimes with a tint in it, and liked wearing wraps and shawls and walked with a stick. She wore glasses and tweed skirts and boots. I know I was only seven at the time and adults would look old to me but the woman must have been in her sixties.
11. I remember three others who, I think, were teachers or in some way in charge. There were also others who may have been older girls or younger members of staff. We were never introduced formally to any of the staff. It was really only the older woman I paid attention to because I was terrified of her.
12. While I was there I don't recall ever seeing my friend [REDACTED] in the building and only saw her when we were outside playing or when we were on one of the many walks we were taken on.

Routine at Fornethy House

First day

13. We had got a mini-bus from the train station and when we got off it I had a wee case with me. We were led into a cloakroom and somebody took the cases from us and told us to sit on a bench. There was a door opposite which led to a small medical room where we were to get our hair checked, probably for nits.
14. While we waited there was a wee girl in the room and she was screaming. A woman was dealing with her, screaming at the girl and putting stuff on her hair. The girl had pigtails and the woman took a pair of scissors and cut off the pigtails. I could see this because the door was open.
15. I started crying and was scared. The wee girl, who was even smaller than me, got taken away and then I went in. I got Lorexane on my hair which was disgusting and

then it was [REDACTED]'s turn and I was taken to a dorm where somebody took my case off me and put it in a locker. I have no recollection of ever taking anything out of the case while I was in Fornethy.

16. The woman in the medical room wore a white coat and red gloves. It was very painful as she combed my hair but she told me to be quiet when I complained. [REDACTED] was taken to a different dorm.
17. I think there were about ten girls in my dorm. I don't know how many other dorms there were. I don't recall going up or downstairs but I don't think my dorm was on the ground floor. I think the day room was on the first floor.
18. I then got told it was playtime and I went back downstairs. I met [REDACTED] and we were wondering when the holiday would start. We were outside playing until a bell sounded which signified it was lunch time. On that first day there wasn't a lot of girls in the playground as most were out walking.

Mornings and bedtime

19. We got up early, maybe about 7:00 am I think by somebody shouting at us to get up. You got your face and hands washed in a place just outside the dorms, queueing up to get it done. We then got dressed and went for breakfast. After breakfast you went to the cloakroom to get welly boots and a jacket and then it was off for a very long walk which went on for miles and miles.
20. On a school day we went to class where we were made to write a letter home and this was after being there for a few days. I wrote saying I didn't like the place but I don't think my mum ever got any of the letters because she never did mention having received them. If you wrote anything the teacher didn't like the teacher tore the letter up, slapped you on the face and told you to write what was on the blackboard which was about how good a time we were having.
21. I don't recall any games or toys or TV and we went to bed quite early after a biscuit and a glass of milk. When lights were turned off we were told to put the sheets over

our heads. I just cried and cried and couldn't understand why my mum had put me in this place. I cried so much I was physically sore and thought I must have done something bad for my mum to have put me there.

22. I don't think I had been told how long I would be there for but, in my head, I thought that since it was a holiday it would be for two weeks.

Mealtimes/Food

23. Breakfast was alright and I always ate it. It was cereal though sometimes you got porridge or boiled eggs and toast. Dinner time was a problem. It was probably better food that I was getting at home, a better variety and food I didn't get at home. You got a variety of vegetables though you didn't get any choice. My particular problem was the desserts.
24. There was a sort of pink blancmange but I hated the texture and smell and a woman would walk around making sure we were eating it. I would be sitting there crying saying I didn't like it. Another woman would then hold the spoon up to my mouth and I was gagging. There would be the blancmange and my saliva all together and they would gather it all up and shove it all in my mouth.
25. The first time this happened I thought I was going to die because I couldn't breathe. They got mad because it was coming out of my mouth and going all over my pinnie which made them madder. I wasn't allowed to leave the table until I had finished it and I was swallowing it but heaving and heaving till it was done. It took a long time to get the blancmange down my throat and most of it was on the floor and on the pinnie which made them mad. I couldn't see the faces of the other girls while this was happening. Hearing someone crying "I don't want it" was common at dinner time.
26. I could take a slap, and did many a time at dinner time, but getting force fed was horrendous especially when you spat it out and they gathered it all up and shoved it back in your mouth.

27. The female that did this was quite rough and mannish looking, not the old white haired woman. She had light brown hair, not short but tied back in a ponytail. She wore more modern clothes than the head teacher and was taller. The white haired woman was always hanging about watching people.

Washing/bathing

28. You got a shower before you went to bed at night. There were four showers with no curtains with a bench in front of them in the middle of the floor. There were also pegs on the wall. I would sit on the bench waiting for my turn in the shower. There was no privacy and SNR [REDACTED] or some other member of staff would sit on the bench supervising.
29. Sometimes we would get a bath in a small tub in a room next to the showers. I always hated them because you shared the bath with somebody else and the women who scrubbed you were really rough. The water was never warm and there was hardly any of it.

Clothing/uniform

30. They gave you a floral pinnie which meant I didn't get to wear the nice clothes my mum had given me. They also supplied socks and shoes. All the girls wore these pinnies. They weren't very thick and the place was really cold. I didn't ask or complain about this as I was really shy.

Leisure time

31. We would play outside but you weren't allowed to leave the grounds. Myself and [REDACTED] would play together just using our imagination as there were no toys or any such thing for us to play with. [REDACTED] was always comforting me because I was a very shy child and was always crying.

Trips and holidays

32. We didn't go out on trips other than the walks though we did go to church once. Not everybody went to the church and those of us that did walked. We didn't wear the pinnies and instead wore our own clothes and made sure our shoes were clean. It was only the once we went to the church.

Schooling

33. The classroom I went to was in the main building. There must have been more than one room as the room I was in was too small for all the girls in the home to be in. We did get lessons on our times tables and English. I think it was the same teacher I had all the time who looked like the tall mannish woman from the dining room.

Healthcare

34. I was only in the medical room on my first day and after that I was never back there. Even if I had been sick I wouldn't have told them as I would only be shouted at or slapped for causing them bother.

Religious instruction

35. Religion wasn't a big thing in the home and I have no recollection of saying prayers. I recall I used to say The Lord's Prayer but I don't recall if that was at Fornethy or when I was at home.

Work

36. We didn't do any chores but we went on a lot of walks which went on for miles. It wasn't educational. Because of the boots we wore I would get sore scabby legs which were ignored by the staff. My legs were the first thing my mum noticed when I got home.

Birthdays and Christmas

37. I didn't see anybody celebrate a birthday and I wasn't in the home at Christmas.

Personal possessions

38. When I eventually left Fornethy I did get my case back but, while there, I didn't have any other personal possessions. We didn't get any pocket money though we did get to go to the tuck shop every day. Sometimes I would be told I wasn't getting anything. I think my mum sent a postal order to pay for what I got from the tuck shop.

Visitors

39. I didn't see anybody getting any visitors and didn't see any official visitors. I had no contact with my family while I was in Fornethy.

Discipline

40. If you stepped out of line you got slapped on the back of the head. I didn't see this happen a lot to others though you could hear it happening but would be too scared to turn round and look. Discipline wasn't really an issue because you were too scared to misbehave or speak out of turn.
41. You didn't speak to each other to show any comfort as you would be scared you would then get hit. The only place you could really speak was at playtime in the grounds which felt like a relief.

Bedwetting

42. I don't recall bedwetting happening. At night you would hear staff coming into the dorm and some girls crying followed by the sound of their sandshoes on the floor and maybe that was somebody who had wet the bed being dealt with but I don't know. One night I was taken out of my bed and had to stand in the hall in just my pants. I think I was taken out of bed because I was crying again. I just remember the woman taking me

out of bed and saying" I'll give you something to cry about". She took my nightdress off and made me stand facing the wall for ages while she sat in a seat. That was SNR SNR.

Running away

43. Me and SNR spoke many times about running away but we were too scared to. I don't remember hearing about anybody running away.

Abuse at Fornethy House

44. On one of the first nights I was there I got out of the shower and, while I was still wet, SNR put me over her knee and hit me three or four times with a slipper over my bare, wet bottom. This was done in front of the other girls. It happened to me at least three times during my time there.
45. All too often I felt I was getting a slap for nothing. You would get the belt in a normal outside school and you would know why you got it but in Fornethy the staff hit you for nothing and just whenever they felt like it.
46. It's strange that the reason I was sent to Fornethy was because of my weight after a medical examination yet, during my time there, I was never once weighed nor was I sat down and have my health discussed. At no time did they address whatever the reason was for me being there so it does beg the question of why I was ever sent to Fornethy.

Reporting of abuse at Fornethy House

47. There was nobody to tell what was happening to us at Fornethy House. You were too scared to speak.

Leaving Fornethy House

48. I think we got told we were leaving a week before we did but that's only because I recall [REDACTED] saying "We've only a week to go". I had been there for a total of six weeks. I was delighted to get home though it was an anti-climax. I met my mum at the train station and I was still crying. She said "Look at the state of you. Look at your legs". I said they did this and they did that and mum told me not to speak about adults that way.
49. I spoke to my mum recently about having been in Fornethy and she said that she recalls that, because I had been away for such a long time, it took her ages to get me back in to a routine and I had difficulty sleeping for quite a while after coming home.
50. Recently mum was round visiting and we were talking about Fornethy. She said "Oh, that awful place. All my neighbours will think I sent you there". I asked her why I was sent there. She said that she hadn't sent me there and that I had wanted to go. At the time there were various articles in the papers about Fornethy and mum said "What will my neighbours think?" I told her I didn't care what the neighbours thought and that I was only telling the story like it was.
51. She asked me recently why I was digging up the past but I told her there are a lot of people out there who have to speak about what Fornethy was really like and that what had happened had been swept under the carpet.

Life after being in care

52. After I came out of Fornethy I went back to John's Street Primary and then went on to John's Street Secondary, both in Bridgeton, Glasgow. I left school with no qualifications because I hated being there partially because I was always very shy. I think it was a hangover from keeping quiet at Fornethy.
53. After I left school I worked in Condor International for six months before working in a butchers for a while. However, I always wanted to be a dental nurse. When I was

seventeen I spoke to a girl at my dentist's and then spoke to the dentist who said that one of his girls was leaving. He offered me a job and I then worked at that practice for 36 years.

54. After all that time a new dentist took over, a horrible wee man, and he got rid of us all one by one. By the time he had got rid of the others I just got sick of the place and left suffering from depression. I did work for another dentist for a while but only lasted for six weeks. I was then stuck in my house for a year with no income.
55. These days I have started speaking to people and getting out a bit more and feel much better especially when I'm with my grandchildren.

Impact

56. I've never forgotten my time in Fornethy and every day something happens that reminds me of it. I have had a trust issue ever since I was there. Before I went I loved school but when I returned I couldn't trust adults, a problem I have to this day. I find it difficult to get close to people and that even includes my husband. He is called [REDACTED] but everybody calls him [REDACTED].
57. My husband is so understanding about the fact that I don't like kisses or cuddles and we only have one child who is now 42 and has two kids of his own. We married in 1977 and I remember that first year we packed a suitcase and the very idea of packing a case made me wish the holiday would be cancelled.
58. It's the same every time we go on holiday, the act of packing a case puts me off going away. Once I'm away I just want to go home. Being at home is the only place I feel safe. Even on nights out I want to get home and I'm usually the first to leave. I think this all stems from my time in Fornethy.
59. I love my husband dearly but I just don't like getting close.

60. Seeing certain foods in the supermarket reminds me of Fornethy. Hearing kids scream reminds me of Fornethy. It angers me that nothing was done about Fornethy and that nobody believed me about what happened to me there. It was only about fifteen years ago that I found something on [REDACTED] and was pleased that others were speaking about similar things that happened to them.

Treatment/support

61. I was offered counselling after I finished working with the dentist but it didn't come to anything. I have been taking anti-depressants for a number of years for which I get a check-up every now and again.

Reporting of Abuse

62. In the last six months I have been speaking to others who had been in Fornethy and then spoke to the police in Dundee. I spoke to somebody called Midge and he arranged for police officers from Glasgow to come and take a statement from me round about October 2020.
63. I read about Fornethy on [REDACTED] and a group run by [REDACTED]. She had done [REDACTED] [REDACTED] after which several people came forward. I then had issues with [REDACTED] on certain aspects of how she treated such people as she wasn't interested in people who were not in Fornethy at certain times or when they only spoke positively about the place. One of those in the group was [REDACTED] whose maiden name was [REDACTED] and who also went to St John's Street Primary.
64. [REDACTED] is another that I keep in touch with and, along with another two, went back to Fornethy for a day. We just walked about trying to recollect things. I felt that the group run by [REDACTED] offered no support to people.

65. While in the group with [REDACTED] she gave my number to [REDACTED] from [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. After I left her group [REDACTED] phoned me and I gave [REDACTED] which was later [REDACTED].

Records

66. I have never tried to obtain my records and wouldn't know how to go about it. However, when I gave a statement to the police and spoke to the lawyers Thompson and Co, they said they would try and obtain them. I also spoke to Sandra Toyah from Wellbeing Scotland and signed a mandate for her to try and obtain them. I have also signed a mandate regarding my medical records to see if that can assist in obtaining my records. I haven't heard from any of them for a number of months.

Lessons to be Learned

67. I would hope that anybody who looked after children would have been properly vetted to do the job they were supposed to do. I don't think that those who looked after us were trained to look after children. They were too ready to hit us and I would hope that sort of thing had stopped. I have no good memories of Fornethy. I am not speaking out just for myself but for everybody who ever attended Fornethy House.

68. 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..... PFN [REDACTED]

Dated..... 07 June 2021

