

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PLE

Support person present: No

1. My name is PLE. My date of birth is 1968. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going into care

2. I was born in Perth, Scotland. My mum was called but used many surnames as she had lots of different men in her life. My dad's name is. He was not part of my life growing up and only had a very brief relationship with my mum when he was home from the army. I only got to know him when I was 36. I was the youngest of four children. was the oldest, then and then. They all had a different father to me. I was the only child that my mum brought up. The other three lived with my granny or their dad.
3. Throughout my time with my mum she had a lot of relationships with men. As a result we moved around a lot and mum occasionally had violent partners. I only have fleeting memories of my childhood. One memory is when my mum and I 'did a bunk' from a house in Auchterarder through the night. We were hitching a lift to get through to Glasgow. There was an incident when we were in Auchterarder when mum was getting battered by her partner and we had to go to the police station which was just across the road. I know that I stayed for a while with my mum in Dennistoun, Drumchapel and Paisley. I can't remember the names of the schools I went to.

4. I am not sure who arranged it but when we were living in Glasgow I was sent to Fornethy House. I didn't know that was the name of it until recently. I was told that I was going to a holiday camp. I am not aware of any social workers visiting the house before I went there.
5. I have no memories of who took me or how I got to Fornethy. It was definitely summer time and I had just finished primary one. I would have been either five or six. I have a vague recollection that I may have been at Fornethy on more than one occasion but I cannot remember when the other occasion was or how old I would have been.

### **Fornethy House, Alyth, Perth**

6. Fornethy House was a massive white building. As you go in the room to the left was the classroom. Opposite that was a big office. Further along was a tuck shop on the wall. Up a few steps was a long dorm with half a dozen beds on each side. My bed was second on the left. There was an archway leading through to other dorms.
7. The only staff that I remember was a wee fat woman with purple hair who may have been in her thirties or forties. There was another woman who was skinny, and there was a man called zPWI.
8. There were possibly around thirty other girls there and the age range was from around five up to twelve or thirteen. There were no boys.

### **Routine at Fornethy House**

#### *First day*

9. All I remember about my first day was getting stripped when I arrived and being given other clothes. I was given flowery dresses, navy knickers and black shoes. I remember

all the girls were wearing flowery dresses. I was then taken to the dorm. I can't remember what else happened that day.

*Mornings and bedtime*

10. I am not sure what time we were woken up. We showered every morning before we dressed then went down for breakfast. The staff didn't help me getting dressed. If I needed any help it would have been from the older girls. I am not sure what time we went to bed but it was still daylight.

*Mealtimes/Food*

11. We sat at round tables which had about six girls at each. There may have been six tables. I can't remember much about the meal times or the food but I think the food was quite basic. There was food I didn't like and I was forced to eat it.

*Washing/bathing*

12. We showered every day. There were no baths. There were always members of staff supervising us and were always telling us to hurry up washing and brushing our teeth. There were no curtains or anything to give us privacy.

*Clothing/uniform*

13. All the girls wore the same things. Flowery dresses, navy blue knickers and black shoes. There were wellies there if it was wet but I don't actually remember it raining or needing to wear them.

*Leisure time*

14. I spent a lot of my time on my own. There was a small river not far from the house and I remember sitting there with my feet in the water. I think this was my 'go to' place. At some point I was shown how to decorate pine cones with flowers by some of the other

girls. I don't actually remember playing games with any of the other girls. I don't remember there being any toys or games to play with inside the house, or any comics or magazines to read. There was no TV or radio.

*Schooling*

15. I was in the classroom in the building at some point so we must have had some lessons but I have no idea what we were taught. The classroom had a white board rather than a blackboard. We might have been in there for half a day and the other half we were outside playing.

*Healthcare*

16. I never saw a doctor or a nurse when I was there. It must have been a member of staff that put the calamine lotion on my body when I got chickenpox.

*Religious instruction*

17. I didn't go to church on a Sunday. It was just the older girls who went. It was quite a trek to get there because the church wasn't in the grounds. Religion didn't appear to be a big thing at Fornethy.

*Work*

18. We didn't have to do any chores.

*Birthdays and Christmas*

19. I wasn't there at Christmas and I don't remember anyone's birthday being celebrated.

*Personal possessions*

20. I didn't have any personal possessions. I was able to buy sweets and things like toothpaste from the tuck shop at the weekend. Money was being sent to me and I am assuming that it was my mum who was sending it. There were a lot of girls who obviously weren't getting sent money and they couldn't buy any sweets.

*Bed Wetting*

21. I only wet my bed once and I was physically punished by a staff member.

*Visitors/ External inspections*

22. I didn't get any visitors and I am not sure if anyone else did. I never had any contact with my mum or siblings. I didn't get any letters from anyone. I didn't see a social worker or anyone else official who might have been coming in to see how Fornethy was being run.

*Discipline*

23. If you were naughty or did anything you weren't supposed to be doing, their way of dealing with it was slapping or punching you to the head.

**Abuse at Fornethy**

24. There was only one occasion when I wet the bed through the night. When it happened I got up and was trying to move the bedsheet about and the wee fat woman came in to the dorm and caught me. She dragged me out my bed by the hair and told me to strip. I was struggling to get my nightie off so she yanked it off me. She slapped me across the head a couple of times then threw me back on my bed which still had the wet sheets on it. I was still wearing my wet navy knickers. I was really upset and was

crying. I had to sleep like that without any blankets until the morning. At breakfast I only got half a cup of tea because I had wet the bed.

25. You were not allowed to leave any food on your plate at meal times. If you left anything you would be made to eat it. They would stand behind me and one would pull my hair to make my head go back then the other would force food into my mouth with their hands. I remember retching when they were doing it but they still rammed it down my throat. I had to eat it. This was the wee fat woman but I can't remember who the other one was that was doing it with her.
26. There were a couple of times that I remember the wee fat woman sent me to stand outside her office for some reason. It could have been because I hadn't eaten all my food or had been cheeky to her. She then came up to the room, took me inside and pulled down my knickers. She belted me across the bare backside with her hand. I think she struck me once both times.
27. I had chickenpox when I was at Fornethy. I was made to sit in the classroom with a few other girls who also had chickenpox. Looking back I suppose this was probably to stop us spreading it to the other girls. I was covered in calamine lotion. We were told not to scratch by the wee fat woman and if we did she shouted at us then slapped us across the head.
28. The male member of staff called [zPWI] was a bit creepy. I actually remember him as [zPWI]. If he met me in a corridor he would put his arms around me and cuddle me and call me darling. At the same time he would be rubbing his private parts against me.
29. There were three occasions when there were incidents with visiting gentlemen. Each time [zPWI] came into the dorm when I was sleeping but I have no idea what time it was. He took me down into a room which was a staff room or their sitting room and it had a big fireplace. In the room there were three or four smartly dressed men. [zPWI] left and there were no other members of staff there. One man encouraged me to go and speak to him and he showed me his pocket-watch. He was wearing a green

checked suit with a waistcoat. He had silvery grey hair and spoke very properly. He put his hand down my pants and he made me put my hand on his private parts. There were other girls about the same age as me with the other men and they were doing the same thing to them.

30. Exactly the same thing happened the second time. On the third occasion the same man made me kneel on the floor then tried to push my head down towards his private parts. When he did this I ran out the room and went back up to my bed. I was curled up in a ball and I was sobbing, hiding under my covers. The next morning the wee fat woman battered me because I had run out the room away from the gentleman. As far as I am concerned she pimped us out to these men. [REDACTED] put me in that room so him and the wee fat woman obviously knew what was going on.

#### **Reporting of abuse at Fornethy**

31. There was no one I could have told when I was at Fornethy. There was no one I could trust. I was just put in Fornethy and left there until it was time to come out.

#### **Leaving Fornethy**

32. I am not sure how long I was at Fornethy but it must have been quite a few weeks. I don't remember leaving but I do recall travelling back in the car with a woman I got to know as Lady Lyle. This was the first time I had met her.

#### **Life after being in care**

33. Lady Lyle came to Fornethy and drove me to Perth train station. My mum and my sister came to meet me. I lived with my mum for a while in a caravan and in several other houses she lived in with various partners. A good bit of the time I also stayed

with my granny who lived nearby. I started at primary two at the Central District school in Perth. It closed and I moved to Caledonian Road primary school in Perth. Half way through primary six I went to Goodlyburn Primary School. After primary I went to Perth academy. I left school when I was fifteen.

34. Lady Lyle got involved with my mum possibly because my mum was being abused by her partners. Mum was living with men who regularly came home drunk at the weekends and often slapped her about. Lady Lyle was either something to do with the social work department or a charity that helped abused women, or women whose husbands were in the jail. My mum met Lady Lyle probably once every fortnight at a local tearoom. I only remember seeing Lady Lyle a couple of times and I think that's why I assumed that she was my mum's social worker rather than mine but now I suspect she was actually my social worker. I know that she owned Butterstone Lodges which aren't far away from Fornethy.
35. Back at home I was left to my own devices, and had to do everything for myself. My mother did very little for me and put me through a lot of hard times. I left home when I was sixteen. I worked for a while at Crawfords the bakers but this didn't last long. I fell pregnant when I was seventeen and had my first child at eighteen. I met a new partner who I got married to and we had three children. He was very controlling and demanding in our relationship. I kicked him out when I was forty.

### **Impact**

36. When I went back to school after I had been at Fornethy I know that I rebelled against the system and I was quite disruptive. I hated school and had to stand up for myself. I think this is because of the way I was treated at Fornethy.
37. I don't eat fish, chicken or yoghurt. I know this stems from when I was forced to eat it when I was at Fornethy. I also have a hang-up about someone standing behind me or anyone touching my neck. My children used to stand behind me and pull my hair just to tease me because they knew I hated it. This brings back horrible memories for me

from when I was force fed at Fornethy. My children have realised now why I hate it so they have stopped doing it.

38. My husband and a previous partner both knew in our relationship that there was something wrong with me. I hated it when they touched the back of my neck and my shoulders. Sex to me has always been a chore. It was different when I had been drinking but generally I don't enjoy it. I blame Fornethy on this. I still think about sitting on the man's knee and him pushing my head down towards his private parts.
39. All I ever wanted in life was to find a husband, settle down, have children and give them a great life. I didn't want them to have a life like I had, getting moved from pillar to post wherever my mum's boyfriend was living at that time.
40. Because of what happened to me at Fornethy with food I always give my children choices in what they eat. If they say they don't like or don't want something I will always offer them alternatives. I would never force them to eat anything they don't want. I would do anything for my children and they know I would give them my last penny.
41. I am very mistrusting of adults or people in authority. I have to take anxiety tablets when I go to the dentist because it freaks me out with the dentist being so close to me and in my face. This goes back to me being force fed at Fornethy. It is almost like I am claustrophobic and don't like things close to my face.
42. I had blocked everything out that happened to me over forty years ago, but this is all being dredged up to the surface again. I occasionally had flashbacks and these have been happening more often recently since I have been in contact with the Inquiry. Since I found out I had been at Fornethy I have revisited it three times and each time it has brought back different memories for me. I am hopeful that once I have finished with this Inquiry I can put it all behind me again.

### **Treatment/support**

43. I have spoken to someone at Future Pathways and they are of the opinion I may have PTSD. They are arranging for me to get some sort of counselling but I am on a waiting list.

### **Reporting of Abuse**

44. When I left Fornethy I told my mum and Lady Lyle what had happened to me and how I was abused. Neither of them believed me.
45. In 2020 I saw coverage about Fornethy on the ITV News and as a result I contacted the police. I subsequently gave a statement to a police officer called Emma who worked in Dundee. She came to Perth to interview me. I told her everything I told you and in fact probably told her more. She told me there were about 160 other girls waiting to be seen. I have been in touch with Emma several times and as far as I know this is still being investigated.
46. It is upsetting for me because the staff at Fornethy were aware and possibly even arranged for this paedophile ring to come in and abused young girls and they did absolutely nothing about it. I thought [REDACTED] was the bee's knees but now looking back I wonder if she was involved in arranging the paedophile ring and the gentlemen coming in to Fornethy. She is dead now.

### **Records**

47. My lawyer has obtained my medical records because I am having issues with my disability living allowance and personal independence payment. My medical records between 1971 and 1980 are missing and no one knows why. I am currently trying to get my social work records.

### **Lessons to be Learned**


48. If my coming forward to speak to the Inquiry helps one child then it will have been worth it for me. I think there has to be far better vetting procedures in place at any care establishment. Staff also have to be supervised more. All the staff knew that the girls were being beaten and they also stood back and allowed these men to come in and abuse us. None of the staff did anything to stop it.
49. I hope that the Inquiry will do a thorough and proper investigation to find out the extent of abuse still going on today. Steps should then be taken to do everything that can be done to stop it from happening.

### **Other information**

50. About fifteen years ago I read a book by Jimmy Laing called 'Fifty years in the system'. It was only when I read his book that I worked out that where I had been wasn't a holiday camp but was more like a care establishment. The things he described in this book were identical to where I had been sent and now know to be Fornethy. I tried to find out where it was I had been sent but couldn't find it. We even drove about Anstruther looking for the building it as it had been suggested it could have been there.
51. In 2020 I happened to be watching the ITV news and an article came on about abuse at a place called Fornethy. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] There was a picture of the white building and I immediately recognised it as the place I had been sent for my holiday camp. I put the name 'Fornethy' [REDACTED] and it came back with other [REDACTED] where there were [REDACTED] from other women who had suffered abuse at Fornethy. It brought it all back to me.
52. I checked and found a [REDACTED] about Fornethy which led me to Fornethy [REDACTED] group [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. She was very encouraging and told me to phone the police, contact Future Pathways and contact The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. I made contact

with Thomson's solicitors and they wanted to know all about my life before, during and after Fornethy.

- 53. 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..... 30 August 2021 .....