

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PRX

Support person present: No

1. My name is PRX. My date of birth is 1971. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Truro and when I was around six years old we moved to Newquay, both in Cornwall. I stayed there with my mum, father and my three older sisters and .
3. My older sister had problems with my dad and had been placed in care in Newquay. When she was sixteen she left the care system and moved up to Scotland. Mum and dad had problems and they split up when I was eight years old. I was told later in life that the reasons for the split was that my father was abusive to my mother and my sister. I was told that if he was taking anything out on he would use his trouser belt.
4. When mum and dad split we all moved with mum to stay with my gran in the Blairdardie area of Glasgow. To help ease us going to Glasgow mum told us it was just for the Easter holidays, but it was only later we found we were staying there permanently. We eventually got our own flat in Knightswood. When we moved there it was mum, me, and her son, already her own flat.
5. Initially I went to Blairdardie primary school and transferred to Knightswood primary school. There were never any issues when I was at school and I enjoyed my time there and was quite good at the subjects being taught.

6. At the start of the term in [REDACTED] 1982 staff at Knightswood gave me an open letter to take to my mother. I read it on the way home and it was offering a six week break at Fornethy. All the girls in my year were given the same letter. Mum did not want me to go there but I did, and persuaded her to let me go. I knew a girl at school, [REDACTED], who had been there at [REDACTED] time and she told me that she enjoyed her stay there. I imagined it was just going to be a longer holiday and an adventure. The cost of the break was to be forty pounds.
7. In preparation for going to Fornethy I had a list of clothing that I would need for my stay which included an outfit and jacket for Sundays at church and another jacket for going on walks. I also needed shoes for Sunday and a pair of plimsolls for the rest of the week. My family chipped in and helped mum put the clothes and toiletries together.

Fornethy House Residential School, Alyth, Angus

8. It was in the [REDACTED] time that my sisters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] took me to Buchanan Street bus station where we met the others being transported to Fornethy. It was a single deck bus that was filled with girls. I think I was overwhelmed and started crying. The girl who was sat next to me told me that I should not let anyone see me crying as the staff at Fornethy did not like it and would punish me. I can't recall her name. I began to get scared about going there. There were two older ladies on the bus escorting us, but I never saw them again until I was leaving and got the bus home. I am not sure if they were part of Fornethy or from Strathclyde Council.
9. It was a two hour journey up to the Blairgowrie area in Angus. On the way from the bus station we also picked others en route to the school. There was an entry gate leading into a forest area and then through the forest to the school itself.

Routine at Fornethy House Residential School, Alyth, Angus

First day

10. When I arrived I found that most of the girls there were about primary three or four up to about primary seven. There were probably around seventy five girls at the school. We all stood in the big hall until your name was called.
11. In the garden area at the side of the building there were some swings and a climbing frame. You had to be careful as the ground was not like today with soft landing material, we had stone slabs. On the ground floor of the school building were the TV room and offices. The school was an annexe to the main building along with a gym.
12. From the main door there was a set of stairs leading to the upper levels. Each of the staff had their own room on the first floor. Also on that floor was the dining room which was served via a hatch from the kitchen.
13. On the second floor were the dormitories. There were six dormitories at the school with a mix of ages in each. I can remember some of the dormitory names as Isla, Reekie Inn, Forfar, Provan and two others. I was placed in Isla and there were about ten beds there. When I got there my bed was near the window. There was a young girl [REDACTED] in our dorm and she was upset. The girl who had warned me on the bus was also in the dorm. She went over to [REDACTED] and tried to calm her down. Again she told her about the staff not liking girls crying.
14. Everything we did at the school was with the people from your dormitory. You were not allowed to mix with any girls from the other dormitories. You were not allowed to talk when in the dining room together or in the dorm at night.
15. There were some members of staff that I can remember at Fornethy, Miss Fletcher who was the headmistress and Miss Robertson. Miss Robertson always smelled horribly. You could even tell when she was standing behind you with the smell. There was also Miss Robinson who always insisted we wore cardigans to cover our arms. I

can remember one day I was not wearing mine and she gave me a row. I had to go back to the dorm for my cardigan and catch up with them at the TV room. That was the only issue I had with her.

Mornings and bedtime

16. I don't remember much about the day to day routine other than being woken, washed and bathed, down to the dining room for breakfast. We were then in school until lunch and then back in the afternoon. After school was finished it was tea, supper and into bed.
17. At night we were made to sleep on our right side. If caught lying on your back you were punished with a slap from Miss Robertson. It took a lot of concentration to try and stay on one side and not always successful.
18. Every night there was always one of the girls lying in her bed and crying for her mum.

Mealtimes/Food

19. On the first day after being in the dormitory we were all lined up in two's to go to the dining room for some lunch. While we were sitting eating the meal some of the children were a bit slow. That was when Miss Robertson and Miss Fletcher started shouting at children telling them to hurry up and finish the meal. That was the first when I realised things were not right.
20. When we ate our meals a table monitor was responsible for uplifting the meals from the kitchen hatch and bringing it to the tables. The monitor was the same person throughout my time at Fornethy. Some of the food we were given included boiled eggs sometimes covered with cauliflower and cheese and found this along with fish to be disgusting. I used to eat fish when I was younger as I came from a fishing village. I can't stand it anymore.

21. Some of the other food I had issues with were porridge in the morning, blancmange and fruit cocktail from a tin.
22. In the evening we were given milk and biscuits but not if you were a bed wetter. More often than not the milk we were given was off.

Washing/bathing

23. For bath time there were only two baths available for the school. We were all lined up in the corridor and in two lines dressed only in our underwear. The problem at the beginning was that there were workman working there and were watching us getting undressed. We removed our underwear which was inspected to make sure we had not wet ourselves. We then got in the bath and two older ladies, I don't know their names, washed us with carbolic soap and a scrubber. It felt like the skin was being torn from my back. Sometimes by the time I got washed the water was cold. Occasionally they would add some hot water. I was nearly eleven and my body was changing and I found it to be totally degrading.

Clothing/uniform

24. When we arrived at Fornethy we were all issued with the school clothing which was a school blue pinafore dress with flowers on it. The bag of clothing we arrived with was taken from us. Only on a Sunday were we allowed to wear our own clothes.

Leisure time

25. Apart from the swings and climbing frame we were sometimes taken out for long walks. We would have to change into our wellies before we went out. They weren't very comfortable as they rubbed against your legs as you walked. We still wore the pinafore dress and had a jacket over it. It felt like we walked for miles as we were out for so long. One of the places we walked to was a local area known as The Wishing Stones. It would be the whole school who would go for those walks. We were never given any creams for the wellies that were irritating our legs.

26. There was a tuck shop at the school. Miss Robertson would tell me that mum had not sent any money and I was not allowed to get anything. She would sometimes hand over a small toffee saying at least the staff loved me. Later when I was back home I found out that mum had sent money to the school, so they must have kept it themselves.
27. Sometimes we were allowed to watch television by one of the kinder staff. She would also allow us to sing some songs.

School

28. In the classroom the school was using the SRA (Science Research Associate) card system to educate us. The cards had different levels of difficulty and I had used this system at my own school. I managed to get to the gold level but Miss Robertson marked me down to the brown level, which was one of the lowest.

Religious instruction

29. On a Sunday some of us were selected to go to church, near to the school. We were transported in a white bus/van. Mr McMillan was the minister at the church and I never had any issues with him. Sometimes he would visit at the school and have a meal with us. If anyone said or did anything when he was there, which the staff thought was causing embarrassment to the school, they were taken out of the dining room and punished, usually with a slap.

Work

30. We did not have any chores to do, other than make our beds. In the mornings the beds had to be made perfectly and if not done properly Miss Robertson would throw the sheets onto the floor and make you do it again.

Birthdays and Christmas

31. I had my birthday when I was at Fornethy but the staff did not make much effort to celebrate it. A cake was made which was supposed to be lemon curd, which I hated. Also many of the ingredients used were out of date and it tasted rotten.

Family contact

32. We would sometimes write a letter to our families. They wrote on the blackboard what was to be said, like saying we were having a great time. If anyone wrote anything different they hit you over the knuckles with the ruler and rip the letters up and make you write what was on the board. Other than those letters there was no contact with my mother. Although we wrote each week, mum told me later she did not get them all. She also wrote to me but the staff never gave me any of those letters.

Running away

33. I did think about running away but I was never sure where we were. I would stare at a map thinking of how I could get to Stirling and be able to phone my mum. That was the day that one of the teachers came up to me and told me to get ready as I was going home.

Bed Wetting

34. It was not long after I arrived that I started wetting the bed, through fear. Whenever I had wet the bed I had to take the sheets and clothing to the laundry.
35. There was one night when [REDACTED] wet the bed. We all decided that we were not going to let the staff find out and helped get the sheets away without them finding out. When staff did become aware and no one would say who it was, but I knew Miss Robertson was going blame me. They made us all sit in the TV room. We had to sit on the floor with our heads bent down and stare at the floor. If anyone looked up they forced your head back down.

Abuse at Fornethy House Residential School, Alyth, Angus

36. When we arrived and during my time there the staff used a metal comb for nits. At that age I had really curly hair. When they used the comb it felt like my hair was being pulled out. I got cuts on my head from the force they used. Because of the previous warnings I tried my best not to cry. I can't remember who it was who did the nit check.
37. You were not allowed to talk to each other in the dormitory. One night one of the girls I was friendly with was caught talking to me in the room. Miss Robertson grabbed her by the head, dragged her out of the bed and hit her face off the door knob. Miss Robertson said that if I was caught talking that I would get the same. The girl had a big red mark on her face. I can't remember the girl's name.
38. A few days after I arrived I began to have issues with bed wetting. The staff wanted us to use that bathroom before nine o'clock. I got up to the toilet one night and was shouted at by Miss Robertson for not having gone beforehand. She grabbed me by the hair and marched me to the room we called the library. She made me stand in the room for the most of that night. I had to stand in front of the fireplace in the dark. She came for me early in the morning and sent me back to my bed.
39. When we were at the dining tables Miss Robertson and Miss Fletcher would be supervising the meals to make sure the food was being eaten. If someone was having problems and perhaps vomited they would scoop it up and force feed the spoon into your mouth and then hold your mouth closed until you swallowed it. Sometimes we were gagging so bad it would come out of our noses. This would happen at most meals, as there was always someone who had issues with the food. There were other teachers present who would see what was happening but they did nothing. Once or twice it happened to me. There were other times we would try and hide the food in our hankies and drop it into one of the bins later. If we were caught Miss Robertson or Miss Fletcher would slap you across the head.

40. There was one night, just after my birthday, we were getting ready for bed and when we were in the bathrooms some of the girls were splashing the water. That night I was woken by Miss Robertson and she hit my head against something and knocked me out. She may have hit my head against one of the other girls but the only thing I can remember after that was someone was trying to waken me up again. I was never given any medical assistance when she knocked me out.
41. After that incident I was told that they had tried to contact my mother and she had not answered the phone. They said that would be because she did not love me but that they did. The problem was my mum did not have a landline at that time and they were obviously lying to me.
42. Miss Robertson wore Scholl shoes and she would often throw them at pupils if anyone was misbehaving in class. There was also an occasion that I mistakenly placed my hand onto a bannister that had just been cleaned. She saw me doing this and threw one of those shoes, hitting me on the hand. They are really hard shoes and it hurt my hand really bad.

Reporting of abuse at Fornethy House Residential School, Alyth, Angus

43. I never reported any of the abuse I received at Fornethy as I did not think there would be anyone who would listen or believe me.

Leaving Fornethy House Residential School, Alyth, Angus

44. A few days before we were due to go home the attitude of the staff changed and they suddenly became friendly and nice to us. When we were getting ready to leave I was given a Dusty Bin toy as a present. Years later, after mum found out what happened to me at the school, she threw that toy out.
45. When we were leaving the school they handed our original bags back with our clothes. Only when I got home did we find that some of my clothes had not been returned and kept by the school.

46. We were all so happy to get away from Fornethy. It was much the same arrangements as when we arrived. We were taken by bus and dropped off at Buchanan Bus Station. I can remember it was cold and dark when we were back.

Life after being in care

47. When I left school I did not finish my education as I was playing truant a lot. There was a panel held at the school, Knightswood High, and as bullying was the main reason for being absent I was sent to Hyland Secondary. In fourth year I transferred to St Andrew's High School but we could not afford to continue at that school. Not long after moving there I was again being bullied. I then moved to stay with my father in Newquay. That did not last long and I soon returned to Scotland.
48. Not long after my return I met [REDACTED] who is the father of my oldest son and daughter. That relationship went downhill and one day he battered me. I ended up going to a homeless shelter with my son. I was also pregnant at that time with my daughter.
49. On [REDACTED] 1992 [REDACTED] managed to find me and hit me over the head with a hammer. He was trying to throw me over a balcony. He was arrested by the police and taken to Partick Police Station. While he was in custody there he hanged himself in [REDACTED].
50. I later met my second partner [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] had also spent time in care, having spent time in Kerelaw. I had two children to [REDACTED]. Again that relationship broke down as he was in prison a lot. He was abusive to me, and we split up in December 1997.
51. In 2006 I moved with my children to Renfrew. When I was there a neighbour reported me to the Social Work alleging that I was always drunk and not looking after my children. I never drank alcohol at that time. My kids were placed in care and for the next nine years I spent all my energy trying to get them back. I was in touch with a

lawyer at that time, from Carlton Place, who helped and they were eventually returned to me.

52. In 2009 my son [REDACTED] was taken into care by Neil Lennon, social worker. He told me I was suffering from a mental breakdown. He said it was to protect my son as some people who had been abused had gone on to abuse children. I never abused any of my children. He was returned to me in 2017.
53. In 2010 I was with my current partner, [REDACTED], and one night that year as he was coming home he was attacked and stabbed nine times. He ended up in ICU and as a result now suffers from PTSD. We are still together and unlike my previous partners, he has never abused me in any way.
54. At this time I was on a [REDACTED] and looking for advice about getting help from a lawyer. The [REDACTED] started as a nostalgic group for past memories for people who had been in different care homes.
55. While I was on that group I was contacted by [REDACTED] who was part of the Quarrier's group. She was asking [REDACTED] about anyone who may have been to Fornethy. At that time I saw there were numerous [REDACTED] from people who had been there and suffered some sort of abuse.
56. One of the other women on the group was [REDACTED]. I had known her from my time at High School as she was bullying me during that time. She came in and out of my life. Each time she has appeared in my life she has ended up bullying me again.
57. Another woman [REDACTED] put me in touch with [REDACTED] who wanted to listen to my experiences. She was making me aware of a number of people who had suffered similar abuse to myself.
58. Around 2020, after March/April time, I met with [REDACTED] who was part of the [REDACTED] and now the Fornethy [REDACTED] Group. I

stayed overnight at her house, but was quite scared. I just never felt safe with her. When I was with her at that time she could not remember anything about her time at Fornethy. We went up to Fornethy with a [REDACTED] from the [REDACTED]. A few days later I wanted to go to the police to report the abuse. [REDACTED] went to the police the day before me and was suddenly able to tell them all about the abuse. I got the sense she is just in it for the money.

59. We were pleading with people to come forward to enable us to have lawyers take on a class action. As we were doing this work [REDACTED] changed and started calling me a spy in the camp. I am not sure what she thought I could do as I was living in a homeless unit with no Wi-Fi. I was carrying out an [REDACTED] role for the group and [REDACTED] tried to get me to delete [REDACTED]. I told her I was not going to [REDACTED] anything and at that the time she phoned me I was actually helping counsel someone. She was demanding to know who I was speaking to.
60. Just before [REDACTED] had me removed from the group I was aware people were being asked to complete questionnaires about their time at Fornethy. If they could not remember any abuse and could not complete the form in the way she wanted, she deleted the request to join. She only wanted people who were of the same opinion as her. I felt intimidated by the way she was behaving and telling me to get rid of such [REDACTED]. Anyone who tried to join after that [REDACTED] would phone them and ask them about their stories and only if she liked their version of events did she accept them. It was supposed to be a [REDACTED] group and you don't phone to ask people their story and put them through the ordeal before they are ready.
61. On 25th April 2021 [REDACTED] was intending to go to Fornethy with some others. They were intending going to the school to break in and damage the property. I thought at first they were just joking. She was annoyed that I was not going. I knew the building was being looked after by a live in caretaker but they still broke in and caused lots of damage. The police arrived and [REDACTED] and the rest of the group blamed it on two fictitious Neds. After this I was being threatened by [REDACTED] who said she would get [REDACTED] and her brother to sort me out.

62. I had to leave the group and about May/June 2021 I [REDACTED] another [REDACTED], [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Group. [REDACTED] even contacted a foster carer I was talking to that I had been saying some bad things about the carer. I later spoke with the carer and she told she me she was judging me about my kids having been placed in care. She also told me about some of the things [REDACTED] had been saying to cause trouble between us. We sorted it all out and she is part of the new group.
63. Since I [REDACTED] the group, which has about forty members, [REDACTED] is still [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on the old [REDACTED] threatening me, all because I am not following her way. I was being helped by Well Being Scotland and told Janine Rennie there about the threats. She was trying to me tell to ignore what was being said, but that is easier said than done.
64. I have always had an interest in baking and I am now in Further Education to help me with this.

Impact

65. My time at Fornethy has affected my whole life. I stopped being interested in my education. I have no trust with anyone in authority. If I had not gone to Fornethy my education would not have suffered and I would still have trust in people.
66. Recently I have had been suffering from nightmares. My partner [REDACTED] tells me that I have been talking in my sleep talking about Fornethy woods. I am also afraid of dark rooms. If I am on my own in my house then all the lights are on. This stems all the way back to being in that dark room at Fornethy.
67. There was never any praise given to the children for any good deeds. I even started believing what the staff were saying about my mother not loving me and it had an effect on our relationship. We are past that now and I get on well with my mum.
68. I am looking to see if I can get some support and counselling. I don't want to take any anti-depressants. Future Pathways have been helping move this forward.

Reporting of Abuse

69. In 2020 I spoke with Alan Davies from Springburn Police Station and gave him a statement about the abuse at Fornethy. I think the police have spoken to some others and the case is now with the PF. I think they are still putting the case together but I have not been given any update. [REDACTED] is still telling people in the old group that the police are not interested and that is not the case, they are still taking other statements.

Records

70. I have been trying to get hold of my records of my time at Fornethy but no one there seems to be able to recover them. I am in touch with Future Pathways who are helping to try and recover them. I have seen some of son's records and they show that there are no background reports on me, which there should have been for them to be taken into care.

Lessons to be learned

71. The people at Fornethy have been getting away with causing abuse to children for over thirty years, causing abuse to children. I don't remember anyone from the Social Work coming to check on the place or the welfare of the children. I don't think any of the staff at Fornethy were trained properly to look after children.
72. It should have been staffed by people who could care for children. There was no one I could speak to as I don't think I would have been believed. Even had such a person been there I don't think I could have trusted them enough to talk to them.
73. There should have been enhanced disclosure checks and PVG checks but that never took place. Glasgow Council are still denying any responsibility for their lack of supervision of Fornethy House. I know it was run by Strathclyde Council at the time I was there. If there are no better checks carried out on the staff then children are still in danger of being abused. When staff are employed in those homes there should be continual checks carried out on them to prevent anything like this happening again.

Other information

74. Later in life I did speak to [REDACTED] about my experiences at Fornethy. Although I don't know her address I am aware that a reporter from the [REDACTED], [REDACTED], managed to trace Miss Fletcher. Miss Robertson was traced to Essex and I know [REDACTED] from the [REDACTED] group did manage to speak to her but she denied any abuse.
75. Sandra Toyer from Well Being Scotland put a message [REDACTED] original group [REDACTED]. It was to say that there should be no malice on the group [REDACTED]. She also said that there should not be different sides on the group and if it was to continue she would have no choice but to leave the group. Despite her trying to help people she has since left it.
76. I have been back to Fornethy with [REDACTED] I have also been back with some of the girls I know and am friendly with.
77. 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..... [REDACTED] PRX

Dated..... 1 / Feb / 2022