

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PLA

Support person present: No

1. My name is PLA. My date of birth is 1966. My name from birth was PLA and that is the name I would have been known as when I was in care. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going into care

2. I was born and brought up in Glasgow. My mum and dad were and . Dad was a driver with the council and mum looked after the children. They have both passed away. I have two brothers and one sister. My brother was three years older than me. was one year older than me, and was two years younger than me. We lived in Possilpark and my gran lived with us until she died in 1973.
3. I don't remember a lot about my early childhood until I was nine years old which was when my dad died. He paid all the bills and dealt with things like that. After he died mum struggled with everything on her own. Where we were living we had no electricity or gas so life was hard. She turned to alcohol.
4. At some point my brother was sent to a children's home in Kilmarnock because he wasn't going to school. He only came home for some weekends and holidays. He had a social worker but I don't think the social work department had anything to do with the rest of us. I think it was through her that we sometimes went to a caravan in

Eyemouth and mum didn't have to pay. I don't know who the social worker was or what office they worked from.

5. I went to Hawthorn primary school in Possilpark and not long after my dad died the school gave me a form to take home for mum to fill in. This was for me to go to Fornethy where I was told I had been chosen to go for a holiday. I am not sure if it was a holiday for me or to give my mum a break. My sister [REDACTED] was chosen to go too. My brother [REDACTED] went to a place in Seafield, Ardrossan.
6. [REDACTED] and I went twice to Fornethy House. The first time was in 1976 after the [REDACTED]. I would have still been nine. Before we went there my mum took [REDACTED] and I to get what must have been a medical check-up. I can't remember where it was but [REDACTED] and I both had to strip down to our vest and pants. I am not sure what else they did to us or what we had to do. My mum took us there but I am not sure if she was in the room with us. After that we were allowed to go to Fornethy. Each time we went for was for six weeks. The second time we went was almost exactly a year later in 1977.
7. When we went my mum took us to a meeting point somewhere in Glasgow city centre and she left us in a big room where we waited for the bus. We had a bag with clothes and some sweets. I think Fornethy had sent a list of things we were to take. There were lots of other girls there going on the same bus. Some were from my school and some were from other schools. A bus came and we all got on. I was excited and looking forward to going. We had been told that it was an adventure holiday. The journey seemed to take a long time.

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

8. The grounds at Fornethy were like a great big garden. There was one swing and a small bench to sit on. When you entered the building by the back door there was a cloakroom, and on the other side the dining room and then stairs up to the dormitories. There were dorms on two different levels but I am not sure how many dorms there were. Each dorm had about eight beds. The age range was from five or six up to

eleven or twelve. It was all girls and we were all of primary school age. I can't say how many girls were there altogether. The only girls names I can remember were girls who came from my school. There was [REDACTED] and her twin sister [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] and her twin sister. I can't remember her sister's name.

9. I am not sure how many staff there were. The only staff that I remember were Mrs Fletcher and Mrs [REDACTED] and they always seemed to be together. Mrs Fletcher was the head teacher. I am not sure what Mrs [REDACTED]'s role was apart from being in charge of the tuck shop. I don't know where they slept. Different staff were there through the night. The only male member of staff I recall was a gardener. Apart from him we always just called the staff 'Miss'.

### **Routine at Fornethy House**

#### *First day*

10. When we arrived we got off the bus with our stuff and we were taken into the house through a back door by a member of staff who came out to meet us. I am not sure if there were children already at Fornethy but I don't think so. We were taken to a room and given clothes to put on. We were shown our dorm and told to put our bag with our clothes under the bed. The sweets that we had in our bags were handed over to staff and I never saw them again. I might have had a small amount of money which I handed over and they recorded that in a book.

#### *Mornings and bedtime*

11. Every day we would be woken up early by the staff who rang a bell. We got up and got ready for the day. We had to make our beds with hospital corners which the staff had shown us how to. We would go for breakfast then go out for a long walk.
12. At night we would all get ready for bed and brush our teeth, go to the toilet then go to bed. Once you were in your bed you weren't allowed to get up even to go to the toilet.

We all went to bed at the same time. When we were in our beds we were allowed to read for a while but we were not allowed to talk or make a noise. When the lights went out it was time to sleep. When the main lights went out blue lights came on in the dormitory and these remained on all night.

*Mealtimes/Food*

13. At mealtimes we sat at big tables in the dining room. I sat beside the other girls from my dorm. Staff were usually in there supervising us. Breakfast was things like porridge which I thought was horrible. Other meals contained lots of vegetables and soup which I didn't like. On Sunday we got meat. I don't actually remember any nice meals. I had been diagnosed with celiacs disease when I was younger so I was aware that I had to have a gluten free diet. I didn't get a special diet the first time I was there.

*Washing/bathing*

14. There were two baths in the bathroom, which sat beside each other and there were set bath nights. We had a bath one night a week. Different dorms bathed on different nights so we didn't all bath at the same time. On bath night we had to queue up waiting for our turn. The staff washed us. We weren't allowed or left alone to wash ourselves. When they had finished they told us to get out and we dried ourselves.

*Clothing/uniform*

15. We were given a bundle of clothes and a pair of wellington boots when we arrived. It consisted of a pinafore dress, a shirt, and three pairs of big blue pants that were like shorts. These pants had to last us all week meaning we had to wear them more than once. The clothes I remember were really itchy. The clothes we had taken stayed in the bag under our bed apart from on Sunday when we were allowed to wear them to church. This included our own shoes too and not the wellies. They gave us slippers but we could wear our own in the house but whenever we went out we had to wear wellies.

16. Every week we either took our clothing to the laundry to get washed or it was collected from us in a big sheet.

*Leisure time*

17. When we came back from our daily walks we were allowed to play in the grounds. There was only one swing so there was always a big queue of girls waiting to have their shot. There was also a skipping rope. After our dinner we played games then went to bed. There wasn't a television or a radio. There wasn't anything organised. I don't remember playing with toys in the house.
18. On a Saturday evening we were allowed to go to the tuck shop and buy sweets and magazines. That was when Mrs LBD would give us letters from home or anything that had been sent in to us. We were then allowed to watch a film. At the weekend we sang songs and played in the grounds.

*Schooling*

19. We didn't have any school classes. All I remember doing through the day was going for long walks wearing the wellies. The only time I was in a classroom was Saturday morning to write letters home. We were told what we had to write and it was written on the blackboard. We had to say we were having a good time and really enjoying it.

*Healthcare*

20. There was a nurse at Fornethy and she checked us usually once a week for nits after bath time. I don't remember seeing her at any other time.

*Religious instruction*

21. We were taken to the church outside Fornethy every Sunday. People from the local area were there too and we used to sit at the back. The minister sometimes made

comment about the children at the back being poor children and he was referring to us. It was embarrassing that he said that about us.

*Work/chores*

22. The only chores that I remember doing was having to polish our shoes before and after we went to church on Sunday. I don't remember doing any other chores.

*Birthdays and Christmas*

23. I wasn't there over Christmas time and I don't recall there ever being any sort of celebration or acknowledgement of anyone's birthday.

*Personal possessions*

24. There was a locker beside my bed. There were shelves in it where I put my toiletries and my clothes. My own clothes were in the bag under my bed.
25. My mum occasionally sent us letters with postal orders. Mrs LBD gave us these on a Saturday. The money from the postal order was marked in a book and we were allowed to spend it in the tuck shop. They told us how much we were allowed to spend. On Saturday we were allowed to spend a bit more than the other days. There was nowhere else we could spend the money.

*Bed Wetting*

26. I wet the bed before I went into Fornethy. I told them when I arrived that I would wet the bed. They said it was okay as there were a number of girls who also did. When I wet the bed I was punished or sometimes just made to feel bad and embarrassed.

*Visitors*

27. I never got any visitors in both of my spells at Fornethy.

*Sibling Contact*

28. My sister [REDACTED] wasn't in the same dorm as me. It wasn't really a problem because I got to speak to her when we were out playing in the grounds or we could talk quietly to each other when we were out for our walks. We had to speak quietly otherwise we would be told to. I never spoke to her about how I was being treated.

*Discipline*

29. No one ever explained what the rules were at Fornethy or what any punishment might be.

*Running away*

30. I never thought about running away. I was too scared and wouldn't have known how to get home. I remember another girl talked about tying sheets together and climbing out a window but she never actually did it.

**Abuse at Fornethy House**

31. When we wrote letters home on a Saturday morning our letters were read before they were sent. We had to copy what was written on the blackboard. One time I wrote on the back of the letter that I hated it there and wanted to go home. The letter was ripped up in front of me. I didn't get to write a letter that day. I can't remember who ripped it up.
32. We weren't allowed to talk to each other when we were in the house. The only time we could talk was when we were playing out in the grounds. If we were caught talking they would shout at us. We couldn't even talk at meal times. If it was at night and we were caught making a noise or were out of our beds, one of the staff would come in and take whoever it was into the corridor and leave them to stand there. There could be two or three girls in the corridor at the same time. This happened to me a few times.

I was given a cover and could either sit on the floor or on a chair. You were left wearing pyjamas and could be there for hours. I can't remember who did this to us.

33. Sometimes someone would come into the dorm through the night and check for wet sheets. If you were wet you were put out into the corridor just wearing your vest and wet pants. They would come back at some point and tell you to go back to your bed. You weren't given dry clothes or sheets so you had to go back into the wet bed until the morning. I can't remember if it was Mrs Fletcher or Mrs LBD who did this. Wetting the bed happened to at least one person nearly every morning.
34. In the morning everyone who had wet the bed had to hold up their wet sheets and take them to the laundry. They made sure everyone knew we had wet the bed. I felt terrible and embarrassed when they did this.
35. They used to take us for long walks nearly every day. We were made to wear our wellies and they cut into our legs and caused red weals round our legs at the tops of the wellies. If we told staff about it they didn't do anything. We didn't even get any cream for it. I think everyone had red weals on their legs.
36. Bath nights were horrible. We had to queue until it was our turn to get in the bath. We had to stand in a line, naked, holding the folded towel in front of us. This queue went from inside the bathroom out into the corridor. You weren't allowed to wrap the towel around you. It was really embarrassing. If you were first in the bath the water was hot and clean. If you were at the back of the queue the water was cold and dirty. When you were in the bath everyone was watching you being washed.
37. The staff washed us in the bath. We weren't allowed to wash ourselves. They would either use a sponge but mostly they would use a big wooden scrubbing brush. They would scrub me with this brush everywhere. It was really sore and I cried because of the pain. They would scrub especially hard on the red weals on my legs from the wellies. By the end sometimes these weals would be bleeding. I can't remember who did this but they knew it was very sore when they were scrubbing us. Looking back now I think they deliberately wanted to hurt us.

38. I had celiacs disease which meant my diet should have been gluten free. At the medical examination I was given before I went to Fornethy my celiacs was discussed and when I arrived at Fornethy I told them. They just said they had been told someone else had it but not me. I even showed them the medication I had and they agreed that maybe I did but I was still to eat the same food as everyone else.
39. On the very first meal I had the staff gave me a pudding. I told them I couldn't eat it because I had celiacs disease. The dinner lady told me it was okay for me to eat. I tried to insist but Mrs Fletcher came over and started shouting at me calling me a liar. After that I had to eat what was put down in front of me. They gave me food which I didn't think I should be eating. It ended up that a few times I got a very sore stomach and was put in a room which had lots of toys in it. I was told this was the sick room and I had to sit at the table with my head on the desk. I wasn't allowed to play with the toys. I was left in there on my own for a long time. Sometimes I didn't tell them I had a sore stomach so I didn't get put in there. I was never seen by a nurse or a doctor when I had a sore stomach.
40. There were times when I didn't like the food that was served and couldn't eat it. Mrs Fletcher made me sit there until my plate was empty. I had porridge one time and couldn't eat it. After everyone else had left she came over with another woman but I can't remember who this was. One of them pulled the hair at the back of my head to make my head go back. The other then stuck the spoon with food into my mouth. They did it until my plate was empty. I saw this happening to other girls too. It happened nearly every day to somebody at meal times. This happened to me quite often but it wasn't always just Mrs Fletcher.
41. When we were having our food, if we weren't eating our food fast enough sometimes you would get pulled off your chair and shaken. Whilst being shaken the staff would be shouting at you. It was frightening. I saw this happening to some girls and they were physically sick. After, they were given a mop and stuff to clean up their mess. This happened quite often but I can't remember who did this.

42. You had to go to the toilet before you went to bed and you weren't allowed to get up and go through the night. If you were caught talking, making a noise in the bedroom after bedtime or caught out of bed you would be punished. Someone, but I can't remember who would come in and take the person responsible out into the corridor and make them stand there. This happened to me a few times.
43. Sometimes the staff would come in and check to see if you had wet the bed through the night. If you were wet you would be made to stand in the corridor wearing just wet pants and a vest. They would leave you standing there, sometimes for hours. Sometimes I sat in a chair and they would give me a cover. At some point they would come back and tell me to go back to bed. The sheets hadn't been changed so I had to lie on wet sheets.
44. If it was discovered when it was time to get up in the morning that you had wet your bed the staff would punish you. They would make you hold the sheets out in front of you and carry them down to the laundry so that all the girls in the other dorms would see you. It was embarrassing. I felt terrible having to do this. This happened to me nearly every morning. I can't remember who made us do this.
45. On a Saturday Mrs LBD handed out family letters or magazines and comics that were sent to us. If there was nothing for me she would say that nobody loved me enough to send me anything.
46. Sometimes Mrs LBD didn't give me my letters, magazines or postal orders that my mum sent. I know that because my sister got some. There is no way my mum would have sent something to one of us and not the other. It is only looking back that I realise they must have kept stuff from me. I think they put the magazines my mum sent me into the tuck shop for the girls to buy. At the time I probably just assumed that it was all lost in the post. Sometimes there were a few girls crying because there was nothing there for them because packages from home didn't arrive.

- 47. I can't remember any member of staff at any time ever being loving or caring or anyone being nice to me or any of the other children. I don't recall ever being given any praise for anything I had done. I never even saw any children being treated nicely.

**Reporting of abuse at Fornethy House**

- 48. I never spoke to my sister [REDACTED] about the abuse when we were at Fornethy. I never told anyone. I think I was too frightened and quiet to speak out. When we left I told my mum that I didn't like it at Fornethy, it was horrible and I didn't want to go back. She just said we were lucky that we got a holiday.

**Leaving Fornethy House**

- 49. At the end of the six weeks we got the bus back to Glasgow and dropped off where we had been picked up. My mum came and picked me and [REDACTED] up. Back at home it was mum, me, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Life was good back at home and I went back to Hawthorn primary school.

**Castle Toward, Dunoon**

- 50. I am not sure how it was organised for [REDACTED] and I to go to Castle Toward. It must have been through the school. We went there just after [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED] of 1977. I would still have been nine. Again I am not sure if it was to give us a holiday or to give our mum a break. The only thing I remember about my journey there was getting the ferry to Dunoon.

- 51. [REDACTED]  
Secondary Ins I know I stayed there for four weeks [REDACTED]  
Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

### **Fornethy House – second visit**

52. [REDACTED] and I went back to Fornethy in 1977 around the same time of year as the previous year. I would have been nine or just turned ten. When we were told we were going [REDACTED] and had to go to Fornethy. Again the school organised us going. We had told mum that we didn't like it at Fornethy and didn't want to go back there. She just told us that we were lucky to be getting a holiday. I even pretended that I wasn't well but mum just told me that it would be better this time when we got there.
53. The arrangements for getting to Fornethy were exactly the same as the first time. My mum dropped us off in Glasgow city centre at the meeting point, then the bus took us to Fornethy.

### **Fornethy House second visit – Routine**

54. Everything was more or less the same as it had been on my first visit. Mrs Fletcher and Mrs [REDACTED] LBD were still there. One of the main differences was that they were aware that I had celiacs disease and I got only the food that I was supposed to get. This meant that I got things like rice crispies and gluten free bread. It was much better and I didn't get any sore stomachs. I had medication which they gave to me in the mornings and at night. They held onto my medication.
55. Letters were still written home on a Saturday and again what we were to write was written on the blackboard. I just went along with what they wanted for an easier life.

## **Abuse**

56. I didn't wet the bed by the time I went back to Fornethy but it was dealt with the same way as before. I saw it happening to other girls. The naked girls waiting in the queue for your turn in the bath still happened.
57. Just like the first time letters and magazines sent from home were going missing. This meant we sometimes didn't get anything from Mrs LBD when she was handing it out on a Saturday.

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

58. There wasn't one member of staff at Fornethy that I could have sat down with and told them that I was unhappy.

## **Leaving Fornethy House**

59. We were at Fornethy for six weeks, the same as the first time I was there. When we were coming home it was the same as the first time and we got taken in a minibus to Glasgow where my mum picked me and up.
60. It was being organised for me to go back a third time in 1978. My sister wasn't allowed to go this time because she was too old. Because she wasn't going I dug my heels in and refused to go. I wasn't forced to go. I didn't ever go back to Fornethy or anywhere else in care.

## **Life after being in care**

61. When I was living with my mum I went to Possilpark secondary school, but quite often I didn't go. I was taken in front of a children's panel because I wasn't going. I was put

on a sort of trial where I was to go for six weeks. That was the only time I actually went to school. I went back to the children's panel after that six weeks. When I left school I went on a youth training scheme but I only lasted a few weeks. After that I was unemployed and claiming benefits.

62. I married and had a daughter. When she was a year old my mother died. I started going with my daughter to a nursery which had a family centre. I subsequently got a job at the centre helping to look after babies and children up to five years old. I did this for five years. My husband was working but he developed a muscle wasting disease then had a stroke so since I left the nursery I have become his full time carer.

### **Impact**

63. Because of what happened to me in care I have difficulty trusting adults especially people in authority. It has made me very protective over my daughter and I never let her go to anything like I did. She now has her own daughter and I am very protective of her too.
64. When I got home from Fornethy the first time I continued eating food that I shouldn't have. Because they had told me I could eat anything I was eating food that wasn't good for my celiacs. My mum kept telling me that I had to eat a special diet.
65. I thought I had grown out of celiacs disease but about five years ago I was tested and it was confirmed I still had it. I now have to be very careful with my diet and avoid gluten and wheat.
66. I never really thought about my time in Fornethy until recently. I think I had blocked it all from my mind. Since I heard about the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry it has brought things back to me and I have been thinking about it quite a lot.

### **Treatment/support**

67. I have never felt the need for any sort of counselling or support in relation to my time at Fornethy. I had never really thought about it much until I heard about the Inquiry.

### **Reporting of Abuse**

68. I have never reported anything that happened to me at Fornethy to anyone in authority. I thought that was just the way it was. I never even told my mum about it. My husband and daughter weren't aware about my time in care until very recently when I was in contact with the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry.
69. After I contacted the Inquiry, officers from Livingston police station contacted me and I have since given a statement to the police from Springburn police station. That was in November 2020. They said they would be taking statements from others then putting it all together as part of an ongoing enquiry. I haven't heard any more from the police.

### **Records**

70. I have never applied for my records from Fornethy. I have never really thought about getting them.

### **Lessons to be Learned**

71. What happened to me in Fornethy was wrong. It should have been a good experience. It wasn't right what went on. My time there was a nightmare and I wouldn't have encouraged anyone to send their children there. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

- 72. Looking back now I know that it shouldn't have been like that at Fornethy. I am not even sure if any of the staff were trained to look after us. If children are upset they should be comforted. There should definitely be more care and affection shown to children. One time I was crying and they didn't try and comfort me, they just called me 'bubbles'. When they leave places of care children should be spoken to by someone independent. This should be done soon after they leave so it is fresh in their minds. They should be asked how they felt and what they thought about their treatment when they were in care. The voice of the child is important.
  
- 73. I hope that in the future more could be done at home to help and support families in difficulty rather than taking children away and putting them in care.

**Other information**

- 74. I heard about the Inquiry recently in the newspapers and I joined a Fornethy group [REDACTED]. They advised me to contact the inquiry.
  
- 75. 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..... PLA [REDACTED] .....

Dated..... 27 July 2021 .....