

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

ABN

Support person present: No

1. My full name is ABN my date of birth is the 1965. I am 52 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. The institution I want to tell you about is Smyllum Orphanage in Lanark. I believe that I was resident at this institution between 1972 and 1973. I was only six or seven years old at the time and my memory of the place is not good. I am unsure exactly how long I was there.

Background

3. I have lived with my partner for the last thirty years. I have two children who are now and years old. I have worked at the same job at for the past 29 years.
4. I was the youngest in a family of eleven. My father died some time ago and my mother passed away last year. Prior to going into care I was attending St David's Primary School in Johnstone and living a normal happy family life.

Life before care

5. I am the youngest sibling in a family of eleven. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] He is
[REDACTED] We were a happy family with no issues.
6. My family was brought up in [REDACTED] in Johnstone near Glasgow. In 1970 My father got a job in [REDACTED] in England and the whole family moved down there. The job didn't work out and we had to return to Johnstone.
7. When we got back to Johnstone we found that the family home was uninhabitable and needed to be completely renovated. We could not live in it. My family was temporarily split up and placed with neighbours and relatives but it didn't work out for [REDACTED] and me and we were placed into care in Smyllum Orphanage. I think that it was arranged through the local Council and my mother but I cannot be sure.

Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark 1972 – 1973

First Day

8. I can remember my first day at the school. [REDACTED] and me were collected from St David's Primary School in Johnstone by a man I didn't know. I can remember that we were sitting in the back of his car and the song that was playing was "Top Of The World" by the Carpenters. My brother [REDACTED] and I still remember that and often mention it.
9. I remember arriving at Smyllum and thinking that it was a huge castle. It was a bit scary. When we drove in there were some people standing in the gateway but that is about all I can remember.
10. The home was run by the sisters. I can only remember Sister [REDACTED] AEG There were other caring staff who also worked there. I can remember being taken to the pictures

by the care staff and also them making cups of coffee for me. One of them had the name Miss **FBN**

11. I can remember that there were some donkeys in the grounds of Smyllum in a field which was across the road. The field was [part of Smyllum and I can remember feeding the donkeys.
12. I remember a scary story about a "green lady" who was connected to Smyllum although I can't recall all the details. When I recently visited the Smyllum website I noted that one of the streets in the redevelopment is called Green Lady Avenue.

Routine

Mornings and bedtime

13. There was a routine but it was so long ago I can't remember what it was. I can remember that before we went to bed we got toast and a cup of hot chocolate. I can remember going to school and also attending church, but as to the order they came in I can't recall.
14. I do remember Sister **AEG** bending us over a bath and running a steel comb through our hair. She would do it very roughly and it was painful. I might then have to get my head shaved.
15. I can't remember being sent home at the weekends. I am not sure how long I was in Smyllum and would need to check my records to confirm this. It was less than a year.
16. I have to say that during the time I was at Smyllum I was treated very well by most of the staff. The only issues I had were with Sister **AEG** A lot of good things happened to me when I was there and most of the time I was well looked after by the care staff and the other sisters. I was terrified of Sister **AEG**

17. I can remember that the dormitories were very small. There were maybe only four of us. I was with my brother [REDACTED] and another boy called [REDACTED]. I seem to remember having to load potatoes into a machine that peeled them. It may have been the job that I was given to do.

Food

18. The food was fine and I had no problem with it. I would eat anything and so personally I wasn't aware of any problems with the food.

Bed-wetting

19. Both [REDACTED] and I had problems with bed-wetting. The sisters didn't treat you well if you wet the bed. I remember Sister [REDACTED] AEG shaking me. She also made me stand with my wet sheets outside the wash room so that everyone passing by knew what was happening.

School

20. I think that the school was contained within the grounds of Smyllum. I can remember being in the classrooms. I remember that here was a blackboard in the front and that the seats were in rows and on different tiers. I can't remember any discipline at the school. I do recall being asked to ring the hand bell which was used to summon the other children to school. I also remember that the uniform had a royal blue jersey.

Holidays

21. I do not recall holidays at the home.

Recreation

22. I think that there were toys and games but I can only remember playing with the water pistol and the bow and arrow. We also went out on trips to the cinema and circus. I can remember buying the cough sweets Victory V's when we went to the pictures.
23. I also recall being in the playground with the girls when they were playing with skipping ropes. To this day I still remember one of the rhymes it went like this " Hands up kick the can, [REDACTED] got a man, If you want to know his name his name is [REDACTED] ABN [REDACTED] ". I can remember [REDACTED] giving me a kiss on the cheek.

Pocket money.

24. I do remember getting pocket money but I can't remember how much. You would be taken to the cinema or the circus and so you were able to spend your pocket money. You would also go to the local café when your relatives visited.

Birthdays and Christmas

25. I don't remember birthdays but I suspect I was only there for one birthday. Christmas was celebrated and you did get a present. I think that I got a water pistol and [REDACTED] got a bow and arrow.

Visits/Inspections

26. I do remember getting visits from my family members. I can remember being taken out of the home by my sister [REDACTED] and my cousin [REDACTED]. I think that these visits happened on a Saturday. I do remember being taken to a circus in Glasgow and seeing some of my brothers and sisters there. It was a chance meeting.
27. I do not recall any official visits from the Council and I do not recall any inspections of the home.

Medical care

28. I don't think that there was any problems although I don't remember seeing a doctor or going to a dentist in the time that I was there.

Running away

29. I never ran away when I was at Smyllum but I know that my brother did. He told me that he received a beating for running away from the sisters but he didn't say who gave it to him.

Abuse

30. The only person that I remember abusing me in Smyllum was Sister [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED]. She was very cruel and used to shake you and dig her knuckles into your chest which was very painful. I never cried and would just look at her which made her angrier. I think that she thought I was being defiant. I spent a lot of time trying to keep Sister [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] happy so she wouldn't turn on me.
31. Sister [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] once came in to the television room where I was with my brother. I was sitting on the floor and she pulled me up by my hair. She had discovered that my bed was wet and I had tried to hide it from her by making it up when it was still wet.
32. I was bed-wetting so getting up in the morning was a problem to me. I was scared of the consequences of being found with a wet bed. There were occasions when I would make up my bed when it was wet and try to conceal it from the sisters. I also used to hide my wet pyjamas.

33. Sister AEG used to get a steel comb and run it through my hair. She used to do it so that it was very painful and the comb would dig into your head. She was inspecting you for nits. You would then be taken and your head would be shaved.
34. It might have been the first day that [REDACTED] and I were there when we were sitting in the dining room. [REDACTED] didn't like pudding and couldn't eat it. I was sitting next to [REDACTED] and Sister AEG told me to stay where I was despite the fact that I had finished my meal. She then put the pudding onto a spoon and started wiping it on [REDACTED] face and in his hair. She was hitting him with the spoon.
35. When [REDACTED] got a gift of a bow and arrow for Christmas there was an unfortunate incident with Sister AEG. The arrows had little suckers on the end so [REDACTED] would fire it at me and I would fire my water pistol at him. We were playing in the dormitory and I went to the toilet. [REDACTED] was waiting for me to come in the door to shoot me with his bow and arrow. Unfortunately first through the door was Sister AEG and [REDACTED] fired the arrow at her. When I came back into the room [REDACTED] was lying on the bed crying. The bow and arrow was taken off [REDACTED] and Sister AEG hit him with it. I can remember [REDACTED] both laughing and crying when he was trying to tell me what had happened.

Leaving Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark 1973

36. I think that both [REDACTED] and I left Smyllum sometime in 1973. The reason we got to leave is because the renovation at our house in [REDACTED] had been completed and we could all move back in. All I can remember is that it was great to be home.

Life after care

37. I led a very normal life after I left care. I had no difficulties coping with my life and I don't believe I was really affected as a result of my time in care. I have dealt with other issues in life that I would consider to be much worse.

Reporting abuse

38. I never reported any of what happened to me when I was in Smyllum. I have hardly even discussed it with family members. I have had no contact with the police in respect of the abuse.

Impact

39. My time in care had little or no impact on my life. I have had to deal with much worse problems. I did not require counselling as a result of my time in care and have never felt the need. I had good experiences in care and my only bad experiences always involved Sister [REDACTED] AEG
40. I can still remember Sister [REDACTED] AEG I am absolutely confident that if you showed me a picture of her I would recognise her immediately such was the effect that she had on me. I couldn't really describe her because when I was in the home she probably appeared as an older woman to me.
41. One of the things that resulted from my time in care was my hatred of the catholic church and of nuns and priests in particular which I still feel to this day. These people were supposed to be people of god and their behaviour was anything but. They were cruel and harsh in their treatment of everybody and I spent a lot of time trying to avoid them. There was no love.

Records

42. I have only now made application to look at the records about my time in Smyllum and I think it would solve the issue I have about when I was actually there and how long I was there for.

Lessons to be learned

43. I read a lot of what had happened at Smyllum online. I got very angry when I read what a former head nun had said in the press. She stated that no abuse had taken place at Smyllum during the time that she was working there. This was not the case and I knew it was not the truth. I also saw on the news a story about a woman who had been there for ten years and talked about all the abuse. I think that the woman was at Smyllum when I was there. I had to tell my story to confirm what had happened and so that these people were believed..

44. 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. 23/11/17