

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

AAW

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is AAW. My date of birth is AAW. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I am a widow, and I have two children, and who are away from home but stay locally.

Life before going into care

3. My mother and father are both deceased. My mother was and my father was. Our family home was in.
- 4.
5. I was one of children. was the eldest, then myself, and are dead now.
6. My parents liked a drink and were always fighting. We were all in and out of care. I was in Smyllum Park twice.

Routine at Smyllum Park Orphanage

General

7. The first time I was in Smyllum was in 1955 when I was [REDACTED]. I was there for one year. My younger brother [REDACTED] was also there but we were split up. I don't know why we went in, maybe my mum was having another baby. I didn't like it.
8. I have memories of the cold baths we were put in and being hit by nuns. I can't remember names from the first time.
9. I don't recall leaving Smyllum to go back home, but I know I did not want to go back. We went back to the family home.
10. After leaving Smyllum the first time I went home, but I also went to stay in Barrholm in Largs. I don't know why. When I went there all my brothers and sisters were also there.
11. Then I was in [REDACTED] Convalescent Home. I had a bad heart and had to go in there. I wasn't at those places for long and they were both fine.
12. In 1960, when I was ten, I went back to Smyllum.
13. The second time I went in was after my dad was involved in a car accident in Paisley [REDACTED]. He went to [REDACTED] Hospital for a long time after that.
14. I remember [REDACTED] HBK [REDACTED] a social worker came to the house we were in. We were all at somebody's house for a wedding, and we were taken to the [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. It was a big medical centre. I don't remember any parents being there.
15. [REDACTED] and myself were taken to the [REDACTED]. My older brother [REDACTED] stayed at home because he was [REDACTED]. My sister [REDACTED] was already at [REDACTED] Aberdeen and my sister [REDACTED] was in [REDACTED].

16. The [REDACTED] and then we were taken back home. After a couple of days the welfare came back and took us to a social work building in [REDACTED] Paisley.
17. They held a children's panel for [REDACTED] us and we were all taken to Smyllum. That was [REDACTED] and myself. I remember screaming that I didn't want to go back to Smyllum.

First day

18. We were taken to Smyllum, that second time, by our social worker Christine McCaig. On our first day I remember going in the big doors. The sisters split our family up and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were taken away to the boys side. [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] was [REDACTED]
19. [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] she went to St Theresa's Dormitory. [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] and she and I went to the Angel Guardians Dormitory.
20. I remember I wanted to see [REDACTED] and my brothers, but we were split up and I was not allowed to see them.
21. Before Smyllum, I went to a [REDACTED] in Paisley because of my heart and my respiratory problems. When I was there I always had a sleep in the afternoon. On my first day at Smyllum I thought it would be the same. After lunch I went up to my bed.
22. I got into quite a lot of bother for that. Sister [REDACTED] EAA [REDACTED] found me sleeping that first time and told me that didn't happen at Smyllum.

Mornings and bedtime

23. We got up at 7.30am, made our beds, tidied the dorm and went down for breakfast.

24. If you had wet your bed you were punished. HBO would drag you out your bed and put you in a cold bath. She was a carer who worked there. It never happened to me but she did it to my sister. I saw her dip in and out of a cold bath.
25. At bedtime all the youngsters went to the dorms for 8.30pm. One of the older kids would be sent to check they were in their beds. That was done on a rota.
26. Between 9pm and 9.30pm the older kids would have their prayers with Sister HBP then go to bed.
27. The first dormitory I was in was the Angel Guardians. There were about twenty girls in the dormitory, and we were all under thirteen.
28. From age fourteen I went to St Mary's dormitory. That dormitory was divided into about 20-25 cubicles. They had side walls and were open at the bottom. There was a curtain there to give a bit more privacy. You had a wee bed and wardrobe.

Washing and bathing

29. We had baths most mornings. If you didn't then you would have a shower. Showers came later though, to start with it was only baths.

Food / Mealtime

30. Breakfast was porridge and we had white and brown bread. You only got brown if you finished your white.
31. We ate in a big hall, but that all changed later and we had our meals at the front of the dorm. That was in St Mary's Dormitory where we did everything in the dorm.
32. The food was not the best. One particular meal we had was a stew with bacon rind and egg in it. It was made by Sister HBQ. We all hated it. There was a Sister

HBR who came up from London to look around and she changed things. After she came up we never had that meal again.

33. The first Friday of every month was called Good Friday. We had a religious meal. We had a special supper that day which was a boiled egg, a lump of cheese and a bag of crisps.
34. There was a fire in Smyllum and the kitchen went up in flames. We couldn't get meals so we got breakfast down at the school. Then the kitchen got all modernised.
35. I once got caught stealing ice-cream from the fridge freezers in the kitchen. Sister **HBP** caught us eating it in the dorm, and I got battered for that.
36. Sister **EAB** once caught us for smoking and took us to the top clothes room. She asked **[REDACTED]** if she had been smoking and told her she was the colour of smoke. **[REDACTED]** was a coloured girl.
37. If you didn't eat your food you would have to sit until it was finished or it was left for you to eat at the next meal. The nuns would slap you to try and make you eat it.
38. That happened to me with **HBO**. She pulled my cheeks and my ears. I was also slapped by Sister **AFU** and Sister **EAB** at mealtimes.
39. Sister **EAB** had big hands and would slap and punch me. She would have you for anything. She used a leather belt on me.

Leisure time

40. When we were outside during the day everyone played together. When we were inside you just played in your own dormitory area.

41. There were some books and toys but not a lot. I remember a television and a small gramophone. I think there were some games. We played at set times and more or less all day on a Saturday, if we were not at the pictures.
42. If you were on front door duty on a Saturday you would get paid 25p. You had to stay back and speak to anyone that visited so that you could go and get a nun for them.
43. We played no sports at all. We were always supervised by a nun and usually by Miss HBO
44. On Saturdays we would go to the pictures. If you were eleven or younger you got two shillings, and if you were twelve or over you got three shillings. We walked there and back in file, two at a time.
45. There was also a donkey we would go and play with up by the farm in Smyllum. Smyllum had their own farm with cows and milk. BAC seemed to do all that. BAC was the who did the furnace and other jobs around the place.

Trips and holidays

46. We went to a camp place in West Linton on holidays. It was for two weeks every year. Only the older ones got to go, not the whole home. It was boys and girls.
47. I remember West Linton because one year I was swimming and got caught in a whirlpool type thing. I was getting pulled under and was really drowning. BAC BAC helped me out and I went to the sick bay.
48. I finished up spending two weeks in the sick bay and missed the whole holiday.
49. We once had a trip to London. I remember we saw St Paul's Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament. We got new clothes and uniforms. We had brown trousers, cardigans and jumpers.

50. We also went to St. Andrews. Those were good times because things changed for two weeks. They were happier times when things were more open and no-one was getting pulled up. The nuns were there but it wasn't the same.

Christmas and birthdays

51. At Christmas there was more church than anything. We had a better meal on Christmas Day but it was not a happy Christmas or anything.
52. We got some presents but not a lot. I got a conductress set at a party. A woman told me it was the wrong gift and I had to put it back. Then I got to pick another for myself from a line of presents. I picked a clock which I used to set alarms for Sister HBP in the mornings.
53. There was a big Christmas tree in the main hall but there wasn't any other decorations.
54. We also went to a Celtic football club Christmas party. So if you were in favour you got picked to go to that. That was very good and some of the players would be there.
55. I may have got a birthday card from my parents but the nuns didn't mark your birthday at all.

Visitors

56. Visiting was on Saturdays unless it was for a special occasion. My mum visited once and told me I was getting out. That never happened.
57. My dad visited me a few times once he got out of hospital. He came to see me about five or six times.

58. I remember we once went on a bus trip to Ayr and I saw my dad selling papers. Sister [REDACTED] EAB [REDACTED] shouted at me to get back from him and I told her it was my daddy. My dad asked if he could take us round the town but he was told no.

59. The social workers would come round but they never did any good. Sister [REDACTED] EAB [REDACTED] or whoever would always sit in so you couldn't tell the social workers anything.

60. My social workers were [REDACTED] HBK [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] HBN [REDACTED] I saw them about twice a year.

61. You were never on your own with any visitors, even with your parents. The sisters were always hanging about.

Family/siblings

62. The only time I ever saw my brothers was at primary school in Smyllum. I never saw them outside of school. When [REDACTED] was eleven and [REDACTED] was ten, they were both moved to Falkland in Fife. Nobody even told us they had been moved away.

63. I would see [REDACTED] as she was in my dormitory, but I would get hit if I tried to see [REDACTED]. She was in Angel Guardians and we were not allowed to go into that section.

64. [REDACTED] and myself were fostered out to the same family when I was about twelve or thirteen. It didn't last long as the woman that fostered us, Mrs [REDACTED] was a right battle-axe.

Work

65. Work included polishing the bare floors with a red Cardinal polish. We did that on our hands and knees. That stopped after Sister [REDACTED] HBU [REDACTED] arrived.

66. We also had to clean the dormitories and make our beds, but I don't remember an awful lot of hard physical work.

Schooling / Religious Education

67. We went to primary school at Smyllum. Then we went up to St. Mary's public school for secondary education. It was just outside the grounds of Smyllum.
68. After school it was back to Smyllum for prayers and then we would go outside to play. I was in the top class and Sister EAA did the teaching.
69. When we were in secondary, at St Mary's, all the kids knew you were from Smyllum because of our Smyllum clothes. We stood out because we didn't have the school uniform. They would point and laugh at us.
70. We had a green or wine coloured checked dress made of rough heavy wool. We wore tackety shoes, which made sparks off the ground, and we had a grey pinafore.
71. Things changed for the better after Sister HBU arrived. She got us new shoes, a new school uniform and Sunday clothes. She made a big difference. She was the mother superior who took over from Sister BAF
72. I was always frozen cold. I remember Sister HBP gave me a really heavy knit pink cardigan to keep me warm. That was very nice.
73. Sister EAA used a ruler to punish you in school. She would use the thin edge and hit your knuckles and the backs of your hands for getting your sums wrong.
74. We said prayers every day in the morning and evening. Then again before and after every meal. About two or three times a week we went to the chapel in the mornings and we had benediction in the evening.

Healthcare

75. There was a doctor I saw. He gave me check-ups as I was on tablets for my heart. There was also a dentist we saw.
76. I once ran out of the dentist's practice when they were trying to inject my gums to get a tooth out. Sister AFU slapped me across the face for that. She took me back the next day to stop me running away.
77. I did get the tooth out, and the dentist told me to go back and go to bed for rest. I did, but then I slipped out and went to see my dad at St Mary's hospital.
78. When I got back I was in trouble because I had missed my medication, for my heart. Sister FAM was shouting and pointing at me, jabbing my chest. She was angry about me missing my medication. Sister AFU slapped me across the head for sneaking out.

Running away

79. [REDACTED] and me once ran away and we went to Edinburgh. We were about thirteen or fourteen years old, and we hitchhiked.
80. We went to [REDACTED] house, but he had no money and was upset that we had run away. [REDACTED] was the same so we went to the police station. The police took us in and contacted Smyllum.
81. We told the police we didn't like it at Smyllum. You just didn't tell them about it all. Not like I'm telling you now. The police weren't interested in that.
82. AEX and Sister HBP came to get us and we were taken back to Smyllum in a car. We all got a right battering. We were punched and slapped, the lot.

83. One of the sisters battered [REDACTED] with a hairbrush for screaming and shouting. That happened in the dormitory when all the other girls were in their beds. They would have seen it and been aware of it all.
84. There was a lovely wee sister, [REDACTED] FAD [REDACTED], she came from another dormitory and gave us sandwiches.
85. When we ran away to Edinburgh Sister [REDACTED] HBU [REDACTED] spoke to us. She said I was upsetting [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] with my running away. She said I would get sent to Bishopton. I didn't know what that was other than a bad place. She used that to try and settle me.
86. We tried running away a second time but [REDACTED] BAC [REDACTED] caught us. We asked him not to say anything, but he took us in and we got another hammering. That was from Sister [REDACTED] HBP [REDACTED] and we were punched and slapped by her. I was with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Nature and frequency of abuse at Smyllum Park

87. [REDACTED] HBO [REDACTED] was always hitting us and pulling our hair. She was bad to us. She was a carer and did the laundry. She had been there for years. She might have been at Smyllum as a resident, as a younger person.
88. I remember she would make [REDACTED] sit on a potty for hours on end, and she would shout and bawl at him if he didn't do anything.
89. Sister [REDACTED] EAB [REDACTED] once told me I wasn't getting home and that my mother wasn't even married. I came out with some comment back to her. She went mad at me for talking back. She took me to the top clothes room and hit me with her belt. She hit me a good few times on the back of my hands.
90. There was hitting for the least wee thing. It was a daily occurrence.

91. The [REDACTED] was not a nice person. He had a hut next to the furnace where he [REDACTED] He tried to get his hands up your skirt all the time. He was bad.

Reporting of abuse at Smyllum Park

92. I didn't tell anyone at the time about the nuns and the beating. No one would believe you. You couldn't tell the nuns about the [REDACTED] because they wouldn't believe you either.

93.

94.

95.

96.

97.

98.

99. [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] The welfare did come after about two days and took
 [REDACTED] and me back to Smyllum. [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

100. After about six months [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were also brought back to Smyllum. [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

101. I was then at Smyllum until I was fifteen, when you had to leave. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
 had been sent to Falkland in Fife by then, but [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were still there. I
 did go back to Smyllum and visit [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] after I left.

Reporting to the police/criminal proceedings

102. I have not made any reports to the police, and there have been no criminal
 proceedings.

Life after being in care

General

103. When I was fifteen and leaving Smyllum, [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] I then went to live with my paternal dad and his family.
 It didn't quite work out though.

104. I got a job at the [REDACTED] leather works. The morning I was starting I put on
 ankle socks and the family all started laughing saying I couldn't go out like that. It
 was a big joke to them but I didn't understand, nobody had told me any different.

105. I also had an uncle who wasn't very nice to me. I was only with them for about six weeks. One night when they were all drinking and gabbing I went to the bathroom, jumped out the window and ran to Paisley.
106. The social work then put me in a foster house and I got a job in the [REDACTED] I was only there a couple of months.
107. Then I went to live in [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED] I ran away from there down to [REDACTED] to try and find my mother.
108. I found my mum, but she was always drunk. I was only with her for about two weeks. Then I went to [REDACTED] and stayed with my older sister [REDACTED] for about six months. After that I came back to Paisley and stayed with my auntie [REDACTED]
109. I just seem to have been one to run away all the time. I could never settle anywhere. I was always running away, but I wasn't sure what I was running away from.
110. Then I met [REDACTED] when I was eighteen. We were eight months together, and then we got married. I was nineteen when we were married.
111. I continued to work after I was married. Then I had my children [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] After [REDACTED] my son, I didn't work for about ten years. Then I went back to work for about eleven years as a home help.

Impact

112. Smyllum had a big impact on my life. I have treated my kids and my husband the same way I was treated there.
113. Everything was regimented in Smyllum. With my husband, he would say he was going for a pint. If I said to him to be in at 7pm and he came in five minutes late I would scream at him. Everything was down to time.

114. If I was going somewhere I would always make sure I was there five minute before I was meant to be there.
115. With food, I would make [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] eat all their meals. If they said they didn't like it or didn't want it, I would tell them they had to eat it. I would smack them if they didn't eat their food. That was all I knew.
116. I would give them the same meal as their father as I had no idea about portion sizes. Then I would expect them to eat it all. Things like that.
117. Even with things like clothes, I couldn't buy my own. Everything is given to me and picked by my family for me. Things like wallpaper and furnishings and everything like that. I just can't cope with it. I'm used to everything just being there.
118. I recently managed to order a suite, but I had to do it online. I find all that very hard. It's always been the same. It's like living in a bubble.
119. I told [REDACTED] my husband, about Smyllum and I told my kids. They have always been very understanding and supportive. I have also told my psychiatrist and the people in [REDACTED] Hospital when I was there.
120. This is the most I have ever spoken about it.

Treatment / Support

121. I ended up having a breakdown when I was about 37. I went into [REDACTED] Hospital in [REDACTED] as an in-patient. I was there for about six weeks. It was all because of Smyllum. Everything comes back to Smyllum. I've never been able to get it out my head.
122. I attend a psychiatrist every three months for severe anxiety and depression. I've been on anti-depressants since I left Smyllum, aged fifteen.

123. I do see a counsellor but I feel she just sits and doesn't listen. After [REDACTED] had died, she even asked me if I ever see my husband.
124. Smyllum had had a big impact. I have no confidence, I never go out. My life was all centred around my husband and two kids.
125. I think my daughter is possibly heading the same way. My experiences in Smyllum have definitely impacted on how I brought up my children, and it seems to be impacting on them too.
126. I don't think I've done anything wrong but I'm not happy about the way I brought them up.
127. I met a local woman who introduced me to the Episcopalian Church so I've been along a few times. I helped by making lentil soup for their brunch and browse sessions. That's an on-going thing every month. I feel it's helping.
128. I am trying to push myself to get away from it and get on in life. Smyllum is always there and I just want to get it out my head.
129. My happiest times just now are with my wee dog.

Records

130. I do not have any records, and I have never applied for any records from Smyllum.

Other information

131. IAB is the [redacted] year old boy that died in Smyllum. There was a television programme about him. I was there when he died. I was at the chapel and we were all made to look at him in his coffin.

132. IAB [redacted] His death had a big impact in there. We were told he died because he ate rat poison. That was not from the nuns, it was just rumours and stories.

133. The television programme said that the nuns had kicked him in the head. The reporter then said that IAB had died of a brain haemorrhage. Seeing that programme really upset me and made me want to tell my story to the Inquiry.

Final Comments

Lessons to be learned

134. I think that the social work should speak to children in homes when there are no nuns about to listen in. I think slapping should be banned. I think they should make sure that all children are in pairs all the time.

135. 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..... AAW [redacted]

Dated..... [redacted]