

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Marion SMILLIE

Support person present: No

1. My name is Marion Jane Smillie. My maiden name was [REDACTED]. My date of birth is [REDACTED]/56. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. The purpose of this statement is to provide information to the Inquiry about our experiences caring for [REDACTED] LKW over weekends between 1981 and 1983 for a period of approximately nine months. [REDACTED] LKW was a child in care at Nazareth House for part of that time.

Career and professional qualifications

3. I trained as a speech and language therapist in Aberdeen. I qualified in 1976. Speech and language therapists deal with a range of speech and language disorders in adults and children of all ages and abilities. There are a huge range of communication disorders out there that we deal with. It can be from swallowing and eating difficulties in neonatal units up to adults dealing with progressive neurological conditions. Very specific intensive training is required to become a speech and language therapist. It involves psychology, neurology, anatomy and physiology. The training involves counselling type areas as well. We are trained to look at behaviours and personalities when establishing a rapport with patients. We look at things like patient comprehension, how patients produce sounds and how patients string sentences together. We also provide guidance for patients on how to use the correct grammatical structure for their first language. Quite often it is looking at

function and how a patient can modify to allow them to communicate in a different way.

4. As part of being a speech and language therapist working with children you have to ingather information about the background of the child. We look at things like what their daily life is like and what they need to communicate. We look at the skills of the carers and assess what they are able to deliver. You have to be realistic when it comes to the carer. There's no point in setting up a programme with a parent or carer who is not going to be able to carry that programme forward.
5. Speech and language therapists can, in some parts of the country, be attached to residential care settings. That might be a role in a setting where there are people who have severe learning difficulties or behavioural issues. That can include places like prisons. You can also be attached to private schools where specific communication disorders are treated.
6. There is certainly a lot of multi-agency working. You can't deal with a communication issue on its own. All of my speech and language experience has come from being embedded in an educational setting.
7. I probably got my first job in 1977. At that point I worked in community clinics and hospitals as a speech and language therapist. In 1979 I decided to specialise in just working with children. I took a post as a principal speech and language therapist at what was then the Sunnybank Speech and Language unit in Aberdeen. That unit was attached to a mainstream primary school. In theory, that school took in children who had specific speech and language disorders. In the school there were two specialist teachers, a nursery nurse and myself. We were all there full time. The children dipped in and out of the unit and mainstream classes. We took children from aged three up to the age of eleven. I think the school was run by Aberdeen City Council at the time. It would have been Grampian Health Authority that I was employed by.

8. The children who went to the school had had their education previously impeded by their speech and language progress. There wasn't a defined period that the children attended the school. It usually worked out that we worked with the children for up to two years. After that period we tried to get the children back into their mainstream schools.
9. In reality we had a bit of a hotchpotch of children. We often got children who had difficulties with their communication and language. However, it wasn't always the case that they had a specific difficulty.

Later Career

10. We moved down to Essex in 1987. We ended up living down there for twenty years. I managed a speech and language paediatric therapy service down there. I did a lot of training and supporting of newly qualified staff.
11. We came back up to Aberdeenshire in 2007. I had a year off. I decided at that point that I didn't want to go back to being a speech and language therapist. I wanted to do something different. I knew I still wanted to work with children. I looked for roles that allowed me to use my skills. I became a pupil support worker. That's what I do now. I work in mainstream primary schools with some children who have social and emotional behavioural difficulties. In theory it is about short interventions but in reality some of the children need to see me on a regular basis. I have lots of children who have a diagnosis. I sometimes end up with children who are on the autistic spectrum. For some of the children I can change behaviour and move them forward. For others I just provide a chill out zone and a safe space for them to feel content.
12. I do currently work with children who have been in care or are in care. I work with their attachment issues, concerns surrounding split families and anxiety issues.

Circumstances which led to us looking after LKW

13. LKW was referred to the unit because he was on the roof of his primary school throwing bricks at teachers. That referral would have had to have been at some time between 1981 and 1983. I think I only had an involvement with LKW until approximately 1982 but I can't be sure. He certainly wasn't in the unit in November 1983. I know that because I have a leaving picture of the unit at that date and LKW is not in the photo.
14. LKW was five years old when he was referred to the unit. At that time he was still living with his mum. His father was in prison because he had poured a full kettle of boiling water over LKW when he was a baby. LKW had a lot of very significant scarred tissue on his back and chest. I think whatever clothing he had on at the time had got stuck to his skin. We were never sure whether LKW remembered the incident.
15. I don't recall LKW having siblings. I seem to recall LKW mum had a baby at one point to another partner. I think I was told that at a later stage and not when we were seeing LKW
16. LKW did have general delayed speech and language development. If I'm honest it probably would have resolved itself eventually. That said, he did speak differently. That would have made him feel different. His language was quite restricted. His peers would not have understood what he was saying. In theory he was with the unit for assessment only. In reality we all knew that he would be with us for some time.
17. I worked with LKW to improve his production of speech sounds and did a little bit of work to expand his use of language. In the end, his speech issues were actually moved on quite quickly.
18. During the time that LKW was attending the unit he was taken into care at Nazareth House. I think that could have been at some point in 1981. LKW was taken into care because his father had been released from prison and had come back to the

family home. It was decided that [LKW] would be taken into Nazareth House whilst social work worked with [LKW] mother to help her understand that [LKW] father couldn't live in the family home. [LKW] was in Nazareth House for no longer than a year.

Nazareth House, Aberdeen

19. The only interaction I had with Nazareth House concerned [LKW]. I know that there were other children in Nazareth House who accessed our services. It may just be that they were being seen by other persons in the unit. I would only be able to really comment about one child who had been at Nazareth House.
20. The building, by nature of what it was, was pretty clinical and austere. It was Victorian, big, echoey and gloomy. I don't recall walking away and thinking to myself "Oh my goodness" when visiting Nazareth House. I came away thinking that it was a care setting but there were big comfy sofas, the kids were chargin' about, there were toys and it was warm.
21. You were quite restricted as to what parts of the building you had access to. You were given guidance as to where you could go. I don't think I found that unusual as a professional back then. At the end of the day, people have meeting rooms and areas where they gather to do things. I guess some places might ask you whether you want a tour but that wasn't always the case.
22. I do remember seeing [LKW] bedroom at Nazareth House. He was quite proud of it. He wanted to show it to us. We had a look round. It was a perfectly reasonable single bedroom for a boy of his age.
23. I remember us making the decision to visit [LKW] at Nazareth House on Christmas Day rather than bringing him to our home. We felt that if he had come home with us it wouldn't be beneficial because he was due to go back, eventually, to his own

family home. We felt that we needed to visit him but taking him out to our home would be a bit like rubbing his nose in things.

24. When we went I think we were there for about three hours just playing. There was a Christmas tree and presents. The kids were charging about playing with things. At the end of the day it wasn't LKW home but it was as homely as you could expect.

Sister LHA

25. Sister LHA was LKW key worker. She was Irish. I think she was fairly senior in Nazareth House. She was the only person I really had any interaction with. I don't know any other names that Sister LHA went by. She would have been between her late fifties and about sixty.

26. When I was dealing with LKW within the unit it was always Sister LHA who came out for all of the multi-agency review meetings. She was the person who did any follow up speech work with LKW at Nazareth House. I think I did meet with her once for a meeting with LKW in my capacity as a speech and language therapist at Nazareth House. I think that was because Sister LHA couldn't come to the unit for some reason.

27. From my experiences of my interactions with Sister LHA, she was very positive, pragmatic, solution focussed and consistent. She was very quiet. I don't think I ever heard her raising her voice. She had a very commanding presence about her. I don't think, because of that, she ever needed to raise her voice.

28. I think that Sister LHA gave LKW a consistent positive parenting. I wouldn't say it was overly affectionate. However, if LKW spontaneously threw his arms around her she would respond to that. She would scoop him up. She never ever tried to move him away when he was being affectionate. I think that Sister LHA was probably the first person who gave LKW any experience of predictability and consistency. She had rules and expectations.

Sister [LHW] felt that he shouldn't get too attached to either us or her. That was because the aim was for [LKW] to go back with his mum. I think she was right about that. I could see that [LKW] was getting attached. I remember seeing the way that [LKW] acted around Sister [LHA] at the meetings. He would do things like [REDACTED] play with her crucifix. He was quite proud of her and did seem to be attached to her. He would sit on the floor and hold onto her leg. He relied on her. He would quite often say "Well what would Sister [LHA] say?"

29. I didn't have any other interactions with any other staff members at Nazareth House. I didn't have any concerns surrounding the care that Nazareth House was providing from the individuals I was dealing with.

[LKW] *thoughts on Nazareth House*

30. [LKW] did talk to me a little bit about life in Nazareth House. He talked to me about the routine. He did talk about various religious ceremonies he had gone to. I remember one time that [LKW] asked me who Sister [LHA] three friends were. I asked him "What three friends?" He said "The father, the son and the holy ghost." I remember having lots of conversations with him about that.
31. I don't think that he liked the setting but he definitely formed an attachment to Sister [LHA]. He never reported anything negative to me. He might have said things like he didn't like going to bed at a certain time or he didn't like the food but he didn't say anything more. I didn't have any concerns about [LKW] being in that setting from the things he was describing to me.

Taking [LKW] home for weekends

32. [LKW] placement at Nazareth House was a short term placement whilst social work were working with his mum. Sister [LHA] wanted [LKW] to have contact with a home setting outside of Nazareth House. She wanted [LHA] to have wider

experiences. I think she had concerns that the setting of Nazareth House may be a bit too institutional for him. Maybe she knew something I didn't. I don't know.

33. I volunteered, after discussing things with Neil (my husband), to offer some help. Social work had asked us whether we wanted to foster [LKW] and we had said we weren't willing to do that. That was because we were planning to have children of our own and we recognised that that would be the wrong decision for [LKW]. I think it would have been the end for [LKW] if we had fostered him then had a baby.
34. I guess the role we ended up taking was what you would describe as a 'befriender' role. Neil and I kind of took on an auntie and uncle role. We were giving [LKW] experiences that couldn't be provided in a residential care setting.
35. We started taking [LKW] home in August and it ran through to the following March at some point between 1981 and 1983. It was during the school term some time. We didn't take [LKW] every weekend. It was probably every second weekend. It was usually a Saturday from about 10am to early tea time. We would get [LKW] home in enough time for him to unwind before the tea time routine. The time we returned [LKW] would have probably been built into whatever their mealtime and bedtime routines were.
36. We didn't look after [LKW] overnight. It was only during the day. Had he stayed longer in Nazareth House we probably would have taken him overnight. That didn't prove necessary as he eventually started going back to his mother's house.

Checks undertaken before and during looking after [LKW]

37. There were very little checks done before we took [LKW] out. I remember a young female social worker visiting us at our home. I don't remember her name. She only sat in the room we were in. She took addresses, dates of birth and previous names. She really didn't gather much information from Neil and I. Even then I expected that social work might want to take photocopies of our passports or something. That

wasn't done. I'm not aware of any PVG checks or disclosure checks having been done.

38. I do remember [LKW] mother providing consent that she was happy for us to be taking [LKW] out. That was confirmed to us by social work. I remember asking the social worker about that. I think she informed us of [LKW] mum's consent verbally. There was no paperwork or signature or anything along those lines concerning that consent.
39. After [LKW] started coming home with us, the young female social worker didn't visit us once whilst [LKW] was there. She never followed up on what we were doing. I found that very peculiar and risky. Nobody ever screened us or checked us.
40. Nazareth House didn't come out to check up on us before we took [LKW] out. They just handed [LKW] over to us. Any arrangements for taking [LKW] out were made between ourselves and Sister [LHA]. I guess that was because they had parental responsibilities.
41. All that I remember having to do in terms of paperwork was signing [LKW] in and out. Nazareth House knew where [LKW] was, who he was with and a time that he was expected back. We would phone if our plans changed.
42. The bit I wouldn't have known about were what interactions there were between social services and Nazareth House about us looking after [LKW]. It felt to us as if it was up to Nazareth House to look after the arrangement. I don't know whether social services were relying on Sister [LHA] and Nazareth House to check how we were behaving around [LKW]. There definitely didn't overtly appear to us to be any sort of joined up approach on that.
43. We could have been doing anything to that child and nobody checked. I always kept a written record of when we saw [LKW] what we did with him and how he had been during the visits. I don't have that notebook anymore. I often offered the notes to people at the unit attending [LKW] meetings. Nobody wanted them. Those

meetings included Sister [LHA] and representatives from social services. Nobody wanted to know. I was quite shocked, even at that time, that they weren't interested. Looking back, with all the experience I have now, I am even more shocked. [LKW] was exposed to risk, as were we.

Routine on the weekends we looked after [LKW]

44. We tried to make sure that [LKW] had a different thing to look at each time he came. He was not a little boy who would do the same things over and over. You almost had to distract him with new activities.
45. We did a lot of 'attention and listening' work. We did that because [LKW] attention span was not that great. We would make sure the TV was off and did things like sitting and playing board games, colouring in or reading books. Sometimes we'd ask him whether he would like to make a card for his mum or draw her a picture or something. He sometimes did that but not often. It was mostly quiet interaction based activities.
46. We spent a lot of time playing with the puppies that our dog had at that time. We gave [LKW] access to the garden space to allow him to charge about. We took [LKW] to the park to play football.
47. We worked with Sister [LHA] quite closely to determine what her key targets were for [LKW] in terms of behaviour. We tried to reinforce and mirror those targets. We did that so [LKW] wouldn't get the idea that the targets were some sort of 'kooky idea' that Sister [LHA] had dreamt up. We did that so [LKW] understood that this was what adults expected you to do. It was things like general manners and that sort of thing.

The closing stages of our providing care for LKW

48. Towards the end of our time looking after LKW we left it with LKW mum that we were happy to have fun with LKW either with her or without her if that was what LKW wanted. From recollection she didn't want that. From memory I think that LKW family was ultimately re-located. I think they were re-located because LKW mum wanted him back home and had agreed not to live with LKW father anymore.
49. I do remember having discussions with LKW about going back with his mum. He was excited. He did have questions about whether he would continue to see Sister LHA. We just re-directed it back to him to ask Sister LHA. We weren't involved at all with him actually leaving Nazareth House.
50. I know that LKW was transferred to a behaviour unit on Carden Place in Aberdeen. It might have just been called Carden Place School. The unit was run by a psychology service. I guess we ultimately just lost touch with LKW. That was fine. We accepted that his life had moved on.

General experience of children in residential and foster care at the time of interactions with LKW

51. At the time of starting to look after LKW I didn't have a huge range of experience of working with children who were in residential care or foster care. In an average clinic back then there were maybe only one or two children who were in foster care. We didn't see a huge number of children in residential care.
52. Most of our contact with children who were in care was undertaken in a clinical setting. The individual carer for the child often joined the session. That individual could be the key worker or someone else from the home. The individual attended the meetings in order to see what they needed to do with the child in the residential setting. They would tend to understand the programme that needed to be followed

up on at home after the session. My experience was that that was almost always usually carried out.

53. Quite often the individual who came along might be a different person to the person who was at the last session. That meant that you would have to go back to the beginning and start again. I'm sure that the changing of individuals attending sessions with the child was purely about shift patterns rather than anything else.
54. We didn't go out to visit the care settings where the children were being looked after. The only residential home I remember visiting at that time was Nazareth House. That was specifically to collect and drop off **LKW**

Discovering in later life what had happened to **LKW**

55. The next time we heard anything about **LKW** was just after we moved to Essex. That would have either been in 1987 or 1988. I had been speaking with one of my friends. I discovered that **LKW** and one of his mates had decided to bunk off school one afternoon. They climbed up on the roof of a garage and fell through. The other boy fell on a pile of tyres. **LKW** fell on a tractor. The other boy survived but **LKW** didn't. It was a sad end to a bumpy wee life. We didn't get to go to the funeral or anything like that. I often wonder whether Sister **LHA** found out.

Final thoughts

*On the care provided to **LKW** by Nazareth House*

56. When I heard that **LKW** had been placed at Nazareth House I fell into the trap of a pre-conceived idea of the care setting. I expected that what he would get was quite functional, clinical care. That wasn't what I saw from Sister **LHA**. Her care was warm, planned and consistent. She had expectations but they were delivered with

warm affection. I don't know that I've seen that from anyone else who has delivered care.

57. I guess, at the time of hearing that LKW was being placed in Nazareth House, I would've thought that that care setting was not appropriate. I would have thought that placing him with a family would be better. However, in hindsight it was probably the right place for LKW to be. I'm not sure that placing LKW with a foster family would have helped given the nature of his experiences and the fact that the aim was to get him back home with his mum. He was a little boy who found making attachments to adults very difficult. I think it would have been a bumpier process if LKW had been placed with a family. I think it was the right care for him at that time. It helped putting him in that structured environment. It gave him routine, predictability and consistency.

General thoughts on children in care from a professional experience

58. I would say that my experience of working with children in care depended on the individuals involved. It depended on the individual case workers and social workers involved. In my experience there is no consistency across the people involved with providing care across the board.
59. The care provided depends more on the individuals involved rather than the organisation involved in providing that care. The outcome has either been positive or negative because of the individuals involved in the care provision. You could have interactions with two different staff members from the same care setting and your experience of them, and their level of care, can be vastly different. One might take a positive 'can do' proactive approach and another would take a more distant approach.
60. I would say that, in my professional capacity, I have had an equal balance of experiences of individuals who have had positive and negative approaches to the way in which they engage with the care of children. I would say that it is still the case that there is that level of variation.

61. I think there has been some improvement since the time we looked after [LKW]. People do now know that they should be talking to one another. People are discussing with families at the start that they may need to provide information they provide to other people.
62. There definitely has been improvement. However, that isn't to say that there aren't things that can still be improved. My own personal view is that we have all got a bit trapped in providing glossy policies and producing things that tell us "what we should be doing" rather than actually "doing the things that we should be doing." It is more protocols rather than actually being able to follow through in practise.

Records and documentation for children in care

63. The documentation that followed children who were in care back around the time we were looking after [LKW] was not written in plain English. I struggled to process and make sense of what was said in the records. I remember it being pretty difficult to decipher what was going on. There was a lot of duplication. I remember in [LKW] case that [LKW] mum came to all of the meetings. She was getting all of the documentation. I can't imagine how difficult it must have been for the families involved to interpret that documentation. I don't think that the records were always accessible to the people who were caring for the children.
64. I think that if there was less documentation, less duplication and plain English used in records then there would be less chance of ambiguities occurring. There would be time saved because people would be able to process the information more speedily. I think there would be a better common understanding of what was going on.

Experience of social services and children in care

65. From my own personal professional experience I think consistency is an issue with social services. I know that we can all read the notes but I think there should be consistency. My experience back then and currently is it is often whoever is

available on the day who turns up. I can see that could be because the usual person who was involved in the case has been called away. However, I think it is important that you have someone consistently there who knows the needs of the family and what the concerns are. I think that would be beneficial to have if at all possible.

66. Having a single social worker involved with a child allows a fuller understanding of the family and child's needs. It allows a fuller understanding of what drives the family members and what drives their daily lives. With the best will in the world, reading the notes alone isn't enough to get a full understanding of the setting and the emotions involved. You can't see how people interact together on paper. There also has to be an element of trust that is lost when you don't consistently have the same people involved. It takes a good number of weeks to build up a relationship and trust with any person you are caring for. I think that not having a consistent social worker builds in a risk that the child won't trust the person involved and won't open up. That would be my view as an outsider looking in.

Seeking the child's views

67. Back then nobody would have asked LKW what his views were. Nobody asked LKW opinion back then. Now we would involve the child. I had that feeling about all the children I worked with. Everything was about whoever had parental control and who was making the decisions. I was aware generally that things were happening with children without them being involved in the process. It felt as if things were being done to the child for the child without their views being sought.
68. None of us, me included, back then had ever got into the idea of formally asking "What does the child think about all of this?" As speech and language therapists back then we were instinctively doing that as part of the therapeutic process. However, that was all done informally. That has changed. Today it is a lot more focussed on what the young person thinks. I think we are much better in safeguarding children and finding their views. I think that a space is created now to allow children the ability to say what they need to say. We put the child's views

forward at meetings. Care should all be about people joining up together and listening to the children.

Coming forward to the Inquiry

- 69. I came forward to speak to the Inquiry because my experience of working with Nazareth House was a positive one. I am well aware of the negative experiences people have had when in care but I do think it is right to provide a balance. I felt it was important to have that balance and tell LKW's story.
- 70. I hope that people will use the information provided to the Inquiry to make changes where they are needed. I hope that where there is good practise people continue to use it. I don't want mistakes to be repeated.
- 71. 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..... 8/2/2018