

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Neil SMILLIE

Support person present: No

1. My name is Neil William Smillie. My date of birth is [REDACTED]/53. 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] over weekends between 1980 and 1983 for a period of approximately nine months. [REDACTED] was a child in care at Nazareth House, Aberdeen at the time.

Career and professional qualifications

At the time of providing care for [REDACTED]

3. In between approximately 1980 and 1983 I worked in customer services and marketing for British Telecom in Aberdeen.
4. I had no experience of any other residential care institutions at the time we started looking after [REDACTED]. At that time, I had nothing to compare Nazareth House to in terms of my experience of residential care.

After the time of providing care for [REDACTED]

5. I ended up working in BT's headquarters in London. In about 1995 or 1996 I got a job teaching GP practice managers. I did that for two or three years. I moved from

that to a role with Barking and Havering Area Health Authority. I was a primary healthcare team facilitator. I helped teams to work together and develop. I then went into commissioning followed by primary care location management. My final job in the health service was director of primary care for Barking and Havering Area Health Authority. I think the trust, at that time, was called Havering Primary Care Trust. After that role I moved back to Scotland.

6. I am currently a strategic development officer with Aberdeenshire Council. I work for a department called Education and Children Services. That role entails a mixed bag of stuff. I deal with child protection, risk and wellbeing.
7. I think what I basically do is solve problems. I am involved with children who are in foster care arrangements or in residential care. My involvement is more from the school's side when things start to be going wrong with the child, the social worker isn't working well with the child or there is an issue with the family. I look into the child's wellbeing and work with various agencies to look at how we can move things forward. I might, for example, assist the school to interface with social services or the police. Sometimes I am involved with speaking to social services, the police and families directly.
8. A typical case that I may get involved with is where a primary school child has been accused of interfering with other children in the school. I would get involved with the teachers and the head teacher to assist them to understand what the developmental milestones are. I would assist them to understand what sort of sexual behaviour may be deemed as appropriate. If a head teacher felt out of their depth in terms of how to relate that information to parents I may meet the relevant parents with them. I would be involved to try and resolve the issue at the lowest level we can. If we suspect there is a child protection matter we always go straight to the police. There is a process for that.
9. In the past, part of my role was assisting with the introduction of PVG into education in the Aberdeenshire area. PVG stands for 'Protecting Vulnerable Groups.' I currently oversee instances where there are problems and issues concerning PVG

and staff. It's a little bit like being an arbitrator where things appear in the process of PVG checks.

10. My qualifications concerning childcare and child protection and risk at the time of the events I am discussing within this statement are not particularly relevant. However, I do think that my current role provides me with some added insight, in hindsight, as to my experience of Nazareth House and my wife and I's care for [LKW]

Circumstances which led to us looking after [LKW]

11. [LKW] had had a really difficult life before we started having any contact with him. He had the most horrendous scars over his body. You could see all this plasticised melted skin when you changed his t-shirt or something like that. [LKW] had apparently got those scars from an incident when his father had poured a kettle of boiling water over him when he was quite young.
12. [LKW] had had a really bad background. He had already been permanently excluded from at least one school. He apparently had climbed up onto a school roof and thrown bricks at people. The teachers wouldn't have anything to do with him. Looking back I wonder how those teachers couldn't handle him because he was a tiny little lad. I recognise that he could be a handful though.
13. My wife, Marion, ended up getting involved with treating [LKW]. She was a speech and language therapist at that time. I can't really remember what happened between Marion becoming involved with [LKW] and us taking him home at weekends. I think it was Marion that suggested to Nazareth House that we could take [LKW] home at weekends. We didn't have kids at the time.

Nazareth House, Aberdeen

14. My only experience of Nazareth House was when we went to pick LKW up. Nazareth House was a big institution. It felt more like an old fashioned school than a home. It had that sort of feel about it. Even then, Nazareth House was a tired institution with tired resources. It was however a 'homely' type of place. My impression was a down at heel slightly scruffy place that seemed to deliver the kind of care LKW needed. They seemed to provide the kindness that LKW needed. They did a good job for LKW
15. I can't really comment on the physical quality of the home. I only really saw the lounge and utility area. It was like an old fashioned student hall common room. There was furniture in there that had probably seen better days.
16. We went to collect LKW one Christmas and spent some time at Nazareth House. That was probably the one occasion when we spent the most time there. There was a Christmas tree and there were decorations. There were presents there. Sister LHA was there with another nun. There were some children there but not that many because a lot of them had gone home. The children seemed to be happy. It was warm and people were friendly. LKW seemed comfortable being there. He wasn't hiding in the corner or staying quietly at the back waiting to come forward. He wasn't shying away from people or ducking out of the way of people. There was none of that stuff in LKW behaviour.

Staff

17. The main person we dealt with was Sister LHA. She was a little Irish nun. She was almost a caricature of what you would imagine an Irish nun to be. [REDACTED]
18. I don't know Sister LHA real name. We only ever knew her as Sister LHA. She seemed to have some sort of leadership role there. She seemed to

have some sort of overall responsibility. I got the impression she would have been about sixty.

19. To me she seemed to be full of humour. **LKW** was a handful but she seemed to work really well with him. They had a kind of sparring 'pulling each other's leg' relationship. **LKW** could be cheeky and say things to her. Sister **LHA** would say things back.

LKW He was an 'Oor Wullie' sort of lad hanging about his granny. The relationship between the two seemed to work quite well. She would pull his leg and he would do the same things back.

20. It is our view that **LKW** wouldn't have made the progress he made without Sister **LHA**. She was like a granny type figure to **LKW**. Marion says that "Sister **LHA** saved **LKW**." My impression was that **LKW** was a work in progress but he was definitely improving. I think that Nazareth House did good work with **LKW**. He was in a very difficult place when he went in. **LKW** seemed to be heading towards being a nice little lad.

LKW *thoughts on Nazareth House*

21. **LKW** never said anything to me about his experiences at Nazareth House. He never seemed unhappy to go back to Nazareth House. He seemed comfortable. He never seemed to want to run away or anything like that. He had done that in the past before he was at Nazareth House. I very much got the impression he was happy there.

Taking **LKW home for weekends**

22. I don't remember **LKW** second name. We took **LKW** home for eight or nine months in between 1981 and 1983. I think he would have been about six when we started taking him home.

Checks undertaken before and during looking after LKW

23. When we started collecting LKW and taking him home there were no checks done. Nobody came to see him at our house. There was no risk assessment discussion or anything like that. There was no discussion about what we were going to do with LKW. I didn't think that was unusual at the time. I suppose that was because I had never worked in that sort of environment. Marion might have thought it was unusual back then because of what she did at that time.
24. There were no PVG checks or anything like that about at that time. If it was all to happen now I would be thinking about how I could keep myself safe. Back then that sort of thing never even occurred to me. Marion recalls there being a visit from a young female social worker to our house before we started taking LKW home at weekends. I have no memory of that.
25. We might have informal conversations with staff at Nazareth House about how things were going but that was about it. It was things like "Oh did LKW have a nice time?" and things like that. It was that level of conversation. There was never any discussion about his welfare. It had the feel of just taking out your niece for the day. You might have a cup of tea and a chat when you came back but that was about it.
26. I presume that Sister LHA gave LKW the 'once over' when we returned him. LKW might have been cross examined as to what happened during the day. I can't say that for certain though.
27. I suppose having a relationship between us and Nazareth House like that meant it felt more as if it was a 'home feel'. It wasn't a professional relationship along the lines of "Oh you are taking out this child so we better work through these checks." Nowadays, you would have to go through risk assessments, be properly qualified and log everything that happened. None of that sort of thing happened when we took LKW out.

28. I have to say that I wasn't alarmed by the way in which the arrangement was monitored back then. Looking back I would have thought there would have been some sort of checking given [LKW] background and history.

Routine during weekends we looked after [LKW]

29. When we took [LKW] home we would try and have as normal a home life as possible. We had our nieces and nephews round. We might take [LKW] to walk the dog or play football. I remember we played a lot of Scalextric together. We might help Marion make the tea or go and get the shopping. It was really just basic activities of daily living. We were just trying to get some sort of normality back into [LKW] life. Looking back, I think we were looking to get reactions from him that were reasonable. Although I didn't know what I was doing at the time, I was trying to remodel his behaviour. I hoped that he would reflect back.
30. [LKW] could be quite manipulative. He was a smart little lad. You had to guide him away to do things like tidying up instead of playing Scalextric and things like that. Doing things to help remodel [LKW] behaviour all came from us. I don't recall us saying "This is what we are going to do." We just used the experience we had from looking after our nieces and nephews.
31. We had a spaniel. I remember [LKW] thought that the dog would look nicer with short ears. You had to be careful with [LKW] when he thought things like that. Given his history and background he could quite easily have remodelled the dog's ears.

The closing stages of our providing care for [LKW]

32. [LKW] natural father had come out of jail and his mother didn't seem to be able to keep away from him. Somewhere along the way [LKW] natural father either got banged up for another long period in prison or [LKW] mum kept away from him long enough.

33. LKW mum got herself sorted out a bit and built up her own confidence. I think she got a new boyfriend who seemed to be a decent kind of guy. I think there was a process where social work tried to build LKW back into a relationship with his mother. They took LKW out of Nazareth House to visit his mum and re-build the family unit there.
34. I think that the point when LKW started building back his relationship with his mother was the point we stopped being involved. I think we stopped being involved because it was possible that we could be a distraction to the process of re-building LKW family. I remember it making sense to us to be backing off at that stage. It was probably not long after that that Marion and I moved down South because I got a job in the BT headquarters in London. I reckon that would have been in about 1984.

Discovering in later life what had happened to LKW

35. We had no interaction with LKW or heard anything about him after the eight or nine months we looked after him. We were living in Southend in Essex when we heard that LKW had died. That would have been after 1987 some time. I think it was a colleague of Marion that told her what had happened.
36. I believe LKW had seemed to be on the straight and narrow. His mum had got sorted out, they were settling down and LKW was turning into a nice lad. I don't know how or why, but one day LKW and his pal had been out running wild. They ended up on this garage roof. They both went through the roof. LKW landed on something that killed him. His pal landed on a pile of tyres which broke his fall.

Final thoughts

37. The reason I spoke to the Inquiry was because I was assisting [REDACTED] with the process of providing a statement concerning her own experiences working in [REDACTED]. I ended up looking through the Inquiry's website and saw that Nazareth

House was named as one of the institutions the Inquiry was looking into. I remember being quite surprised because Marion and I had had such a good experience from our dealings with Nazareth House. We both decided that we wanted to come forward and discuss our experiences so that both sides could be put across.

Comments surrounding checks of our care of LKW

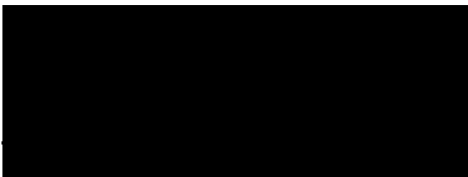
38. I guess looking back there should have been some sort of checking to see that we were doing everything ok with LKW. Maybe there should have been something like two or three monthly meetings to check up on us.
39. Maybe there should have been some sort of discussion as to outcomes and what they were looking for in terms of us looking after LKW. We were doing what we felt was the right thing in terms of modifying behaviour that we were alarmed about. However, there were no checks to see whether that ran in line for what was being done in Nazareth House. There was no joined up thinking when it came to looking after LKW.
40. I think Nazareth House and social work were glad to get additional care for a difficult lad. That said, I don't think that gets them off the hook with regards to the additional checks they should have been doing. They may have been doing that in the background but that is not something I was aware of. I don't recall anyone speaking to Marion's boss for example. I think there should have been more oversight. The way the arrangement was managed could have left a child open to more risk.
41. If there was an informal looked after child arrangement today social work would be looking for PVG checks to be done. Social work would do home visits. A background check would be done with the police. I would think that social work would make the visit with the child. I imagine that they would do drop in visits whilst you were looking after the child. All that sort of stuff is fairly routine now.

42. Looking back now I would have thought that Nazareth House and social services would have wanted to be clearer about the arrangement and the environment **LKW** was being placed into. They knew Marion but they didn't know me from Adam. **LKW** was a kid with needs. He was challenging.

Hopes for the Inquiry

43. It would be very easy to look back and apply today's standards to what was happening then. However, even now, I think Nazareth House seemed to strike a balance when it came to **LKW** care. I want the Inquiry to be realistic. I hope that the Inquiry comes to balanced conclusions as to the level of care that institutions have provided. If an institution has damaged and abused kids then they can burn in hell as far I am concerned. However, if the care was decent for that time then I think that needs to be recognised.

44. 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..... 10/2/18