

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Sister Georgina Anne MULLIN

Support person present: No

Others present: Denis Moloney, Solicitor, Donnelly & Wall Solicitors

1. My name is Georgina Anne Mullin. I am known as Sister Anne. I've always been known as Anne. That is my baptismal and religious name. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1951. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

The Sisters of Nazareth

2. I joined the order in September 1968. I was seventeen years old. I had five years' religious training which I did in Finchley, Hendon and Hammersmith. That took me to about 1973. The congregation were thinking about sending me to do teaching at that time, and I was interested in childcare so I went to Swansea for one year for light experience.
3. I went to Kilmarnock in 1974 and was there for about two years. I am told that the dates provided to the Inquiry by the order are 6 September 1974 until 9 October 1976. I'm not too good with months but that sounds about right. I know it was 1976 when I left because I made my final vows then, and I left Kilmarnock after that.
4. I went to Swansea for two years after Kilmarnock, and then I went to Aberdeen to do my professional social work qualification. I lived in the convent while I was studying. I am told that the order has informed the Inquiry that I moved to Aberdeen on 22 September 1978. That's perfect. It was a two-year course. I obtained my Certified

Professional Social Worker (CQSW) qualification in 1980, and I came to Belfast in September 1980. I didn't go back to Aberdeen for my graduation ceremony.

Nazareth House, Kilmarnock

5. As I said, teaching had been suggested to me by the congregation and I let them know that I was interested in childcare. I guess I was sent to Kilmarnock for experience prior to social work training because you couldn't do the training without any relevant experience. I was very, very happy to go to Kilmarnock.
6. There was no interview process for starting at Kilmarnock. In those days, we would just have been asked to go. I'm not sure that any checking or vetting process was happening at that time either. I went there as a junior sister. There was a senior sister in charge.

Layout of the home

7. The children's wing was to the right-hand side as you went in the main door. It was very compact and secluded in the sense that the children had their own front and back door, and it was separate from the rest of the house. Nazareth Houses traditionally have always been for children and the elderly. I think the elderly were in the main part of the house. I think the church and the convent were also there.
8. The children didn't need to come into the main part of the building, except I think to go to chapel. There were two sitting rooms and one dining room in the children's unit. There was one kitchen in the house that served the whole place. I think the food came in from the kitchen through the children's dining room. It had the same kind of feel to it as a Juliet-style bathroom.
9. I actually thought it was a lovely house, particularly the upstairs. I remember thinking it was like a doll's house. It was very colourful. There were coloured sliding doors in the bedrooms and everything was coordinated. There were three or four children to a

bedroom, boys and girls in separate rooms. It was very family orientated. I think there were four bedrooms. I slept in a little corner room just off a bedroom with three beds in it. There was a big, wide corridor and I know there was a room with four beds opposite my room. Sister [REDACTED] LGO group's bedrooms were on the floor underneath mine.

Other sisters and staff

10. There was a sister superior in charge of the whole home and there was a senior sister, Sister [REDACTED] LGO. I can't remember the superior's name. There were two groups of children in the home and each group had its own sitting room. I think the idea was for the children to be able to identify with their own group. Sister [REDACTED] LGO looked after one group and I was responsible for the other. Sister [REDACTED] LGO group's sitting room was next door to mine.
11. Sister [REDACTED] LGO was probably in overall charge of the children's unit. She would have dealt with all the administrative duties, the monies and things like that, but I had total responsibility for the houseparent duties in my own group.
12. I think we probably had a housekeeper and maybe two staff for each group. None of the staff lived in the home. I can't remember who the staff were, but they were really good. The children would have formed really close relationships with the staff, as well as with me. The staff were there when I arrived and when I left, as was Sister [REDACTED] LGO

My role and responsibilities

13. I had responsibility for about twelve to fourteen children, boys and girls. The age range was from about five to seventeen. I think they were all at school or nursery. I don't think I had any babies. I found the children were mostly in sort of sibling groupings. It was the old houseparent idea with children where you lived with them and were always there for them, providing stability and consistency. We didn't do shifts. I provided their home and their care.

14. I probably didn't have any formal days off, not at that time. But you didn't see it as a job. You were living there and the children were out during the day, so I could go out then too. The staff members probably did shifts. You always had one working with you in the morning and in the evening.
15. I didn't get an induction or training when I first arrived. That wasn't the language used in those days. Sister LGO was there as a support. Sister LGO sitting room was next to mine, so she would have been around if I needed to ask anything, and she could have approached me if she wondered about anything I was doing. We got on very well. You weren't just left with the children to sink or swim. Also, as I said, the staff were already there when I came in. Really what you did, and I suppose it's part of what I've always done, is you went in and followed what was being done. There was a good established routine already there, and I would have fallen in with that until I decided how I wanted to do it myself.

The children

16. The children were very friendly, very settled. It was a long-term home and there were some older children there, around fifteen or sixteen years of age, who had been there for a while and were very settled. It was like their home.
17. There were the usual squabbles among them but on the whole I just remember them being so friendly and lively. I worked in later life with children from very disadvantaged homes, and I didn't get the sense that the children in Kilmarnock were from disturbed homes. It was more like they were from a family where the mummy had died and the daddy couldn't look after them, from the sort of families that couldn't mind them but the children still felt loved by their families in some way. On the whole I just thought they were very easy to be with. It was just a very homely atmosphere.

Children's routine and life in Nazareth House

Admissions

18. Most of the children were there before I arrived and were still there when I left. I honestly can't remember if any new children came in during my time, but there certainly wasn't a lot of movement or discharges. There was a stability in the group. I can't recall if there was a set procedure for when children were admitted.

Mornings and bedtime

19. The primary school children were driven to school, so I guess they got up at about sevenish or half past seven. They would have got up in time to allow them to get dressed and have their breakfast before school. To me it felt normal. I don't ever remember feeling that anything was awkward. I imagine we all got up at the same time because we were on the same floor. I would have supervised the younger ones. I'd have got them up, made sure they got washed and then taken them downstairs for breakfast. The bathrooms were upstairs. The older ones would have come down later for breakfast if they weren't quite ready.
20. I was there if the children needed me at night. The staff probably finished about eight or nine at night. I didn't do a patrol as such but if a child called, I'd be up. The younger ones would go to bed first and I would be up with the older ones. When I was going to bed, I would have made sure everybody was safe and sleeping in their own rooms.
21. The children didn't need to ask permission if they needed to get up in the night to go to the toilet. It would have been the younger ones who slept in the bedroom off mine. They were the ones who were more likely to need me in the night. They would have called me if they were sick or needed me for anything. I'm sure I was called many a night.

Bedwetting

22. I don't recall having any problems with bedwetting. It doesn't stand out to me, but I'm sure we did. It would be unlikely if we didn't. I would just have washed the bed down and remade it with clean sheets for them.

Washing/bathing

23. I'm guessing we had baths, not showers, but I couldn't swear by it. It was forty years ago and showers are fairly new. The children wouldn't have shared a bath. They would have bathed individually and there would have been fresh water for each child. I wouldn't know any other way.

Mealtimes/ food

24. I'm guessing they got things like cereal, toast and boiled egg for breakfast. I was young then so it felt very usual to what I would have eaten.
25. We had an excellent cook. She was an older sister, Sister Columbiere. I can even see her coming through the hatch to make sure the children enjoyed the food. She was always interested to hear if there was anything the children wanted.
26. I can't actually recall an incident of a child not liking something but based on who I am, I'm guessing I would have encouraged them to try a little bit. I treated the children as I would have my own and it felt like they were my own. As a parent, you want to encourage children to try new things. My style would have been to say to them, "Try a little bit, just a spoonful and as long as you taste it, I'm happy".
27. I think they had school dinners because I don't remember making sandwiches for lunch. They would have had a snack when they came in from school, and then I suppose they'd have done their homework. They would have got their tea in the evening. I imagine we would have had a menu that was followed in the kitchen to ensure they got variety.

Clothing/uniform

28. The children only wore a uniform for school. They wore their own clothes in the house. The staff would have taken them out for clothes, although mostly the older ones would have gone out and bought their own. They had a wardrobe and locker by their beds to keep their toothbrushes, deodorants and perfumes, personal toys - all their personal belongings.

Leisure time

29. I have to say that the children were really very lively and very interesting. They did majorettes and had to create their own dances for competitions. The older girls would teach the younger girls in the evening, and then they'd have to show you all the new routines. They did Scottish dancing as well. I remember being taught how to do sword dancing by one or two of them.
30. Football is another thing that stands out to me. A couple of the boys were very good and played for the school teams. This might be from my own upbringing, but I don't think guides and scouts were familiar things for Catholic children. I don't remember any of them attending those types of clubs.
31. We had our own sitting room which was a lovely, big room with lovely, soft cushions and furnishings. We had our own television and radio. The children all had their favourite programmes. There was a bookcase with lots of books, just like you would have in your own home. It was just like a family sitting room. I encouraged reading. The usual books, such as the Enid Blyton ones, were the favourites. It was very important to me that the children had the same experiences as I had growing up. They shouldn't have been disadvantaged in any way just because they were in care. I wanted them to experience the love, the care, and all that goes with being a child and growing up.
32. There were loads of games as well. I remember playing Ludo and Snakes and Ladders in the evenings. They loved games. I suppose I would have seen it as time

to be with the children. I often think that if you're doing something with children you make better relationships, better connections. That's what I would have encouraged. It wasn't hard. I played a lot with them. I think you need to be involved in that way for them to grow and develop. I would have played outside with them too. I am quite athletic, so I would have been out with them in the middle of it all. My memory is that we had quite a good bit of outside space. We had fields and climbing frames.

33. I'm not sure whether they had friends up to play. They would have seen their friends as being those with whom they lived. My guess is that if they had friends and they wanted them up to play, they would have got them. I don't remember anyone going out to friends' houses in those days.

Chores

34. The children would have been assigned little jobs like helping you setting the table, putting away the dishes, emptying the wee rubbish bins, tidying the cushions on the settee and tidying up their rooms. You would have had the expectation that they'd do small chores, like in any family.
35. I don't think they would have had any cleaning or laundry jobs. I think the staff and I washed and ironed the clothes. We had a washing machine in our unit at the back door where the coats and shoes were kept. I get mixed up with what I did when I came to Belfast. The older ones were encouraged to do washing then, but I don't think they did it in Kilmarnock, not in those days
36. I imagine we would have polished the shoes for the younger children and the older ones would have done their own. I'm just guessing.

Trips/holidays

37. I have a vague notion we would have gone to the beach. I think there's a beach between Kilmarnock and Stranraer. I think we did some trips like that.
38. I think the staff would have taken them out to places like the cinema and swimming baths. We were dressed in our habits then and we were maybe conscious of that. The children wouldn't have been conscious of it. They wouldn't have noticed if you had it on or not. I didn't wear it at night.
39. Saturday would have been the best day for trips down to town. They got pocket money on Saturdays and I'm guessing it was an amount according to their ages. The staff would have taken the wee ones out to spend theirs, and the older ones would have gone out by themselves.
40. I don't remember being away anywhere on holiday with the children, not in those days.

Christmas and birthdays

41. Christmases were very happy times. The children got presents and we had a lovely dinner. We would have got them to think about what they wanted from Santa and would have done our best to get them what they wanted.
42. Everybody's birthday was important. They got a cake, a card and a present. It was very special. There would be a special tea and everybody would sing Happy Birthday. I have shown the Inquiry a photograph of a child's birthday tea in Kilmarnock.

Schooling

43. I learned to drive there, so it was me who drove the younger children to school in the minibus. I could be wrong, but I think the older ones walked to school. They probably all attended the same primary and secondary school. I don't remember the names of the schools. If a local child had already started at school before coming into the home, they probably would have continued at the same school. All the others would have gone to the same school.
44. I'm not sure if communication between the home and the school would have been Sister [REDACTED] LGO job or mine. I'm guessing we would have communicated with the school. I can't imagine not doing so. If a child had been struggling with reading or something, the school would have been letting us know. I didn't attend any parents' nights. I'm not sure they had them in those days.
45. The staff and I would have been there to support and encourage the children with their homework. Again, that would have been part of what I would have seen as important to help their education, so we would have done homework together. The staff and I would have helped the younger ones and maybe the older ones would have sat in the dining room to do their work. We would certainly have been available to help them.
46. I have been asked whether the children would have had the opportunity to learn any other skills within the home. I think so. I think we did sewing, knitting and crocheting, because I would have been into those kind of things and would have been teaching them. I think children do whatever you like and they enjoy being in your company.

Religious instruction

47. Religious instruction is not something I did with the children. I was their parent. I'm guessing they did it at school as a subject. They attended mass on a Sunday and they might have said prayers as well but that would be it. Going to mass never came

up as issue. We went to mass and the children came too. It was just the same as any other family, children do what their parents do.

Healthcare

48. I have been asked whether any particular member of staff had a role in relation to the children's health. There were nurses in the home for the elderly, but they would have had nothing to do with the children. I suppose what we were trying to do was to make it as normal as possible for the children, so if they needed the dentist they would have gone to the local dentist. I'm guessing they all would have been registered with the same dentist and would have gone there for their routine checks.
49. The home was very near the town centre so all the facilities were on the doorstep. The children would have needed yearly health check assessments. These would probably have been done within the home by a GP who had been nominated for the house. One of the children, [REDACTED], wore glasses so she would have gone regularly to the optician. There was a real effort to make it as normal as possible so that the children didn't feel different.
50. I don't remember whether any children needed to go the hospital. It was just across the road from us so it was there on hand if they needed it. There were definitely no deaths amongst the children during my time.

Visitors

51. The father of some of the children in my group came to see me recently. He said that I used to make him ring the doorbell when he came to visit because I didn't want him just wandering in. He said he now understood that it was for safety reasons. That led me to believe that there was no set day or restriction on visitors. We had a lovely sitting room at the end of the corridor where the children could meet with their family or social workers, and we'd bring them in tea. The visits wouldn't have been

supervised in our house, as the families who came were permitted to visit. I think they would have gone out into the yard and out for walks with the children.

52. I think some children went home to spend time with their families at weekends sometimes. I can't remember who did that, but some would have gone out.
53. As far as I know, all the children had their own allocated social workers. I don't think they visited as regularly as they were supposed to. I sort of recall social work asking me how children were and I gave feedback on how they were doing and kept them up to date. We recorded in a book what the children did each day and who came to visit. I had one for my group and LGO would have had one for hers.
54. I have been asked whether anyone else would have come into the home and had access to the children. I think the Scottish dancing teacher came in and did dancing with the girls from the two groups. No priests or trainee priests visited Kilmarnock, and we never had any volunteers coming in.

Families

55. I have no recollection of whether children were encouraged to write to their extended families or were given updates on them. The way I would see it is if social services had said that this was to happen, it would have happened. If the children had talked about people in their lives and told us they wanted news about them, I'm guessing we would have passed that on. We would have been more like the conduit, paying attention to what the children were saying and what they wanted, and it would have been for social services to then make the connections.

Reviews

56. I know what care placement reviews are, but I can't say for definite whether I went to any in relation to the children in my group. I was the one who would have known the children so you would think I would have been invited, but I can't say for definite.

Discipline and punishment

57. They were actually pretty good children. I don't remember them being very difficult at all. I suppose I'd have disciplined them in the usual way by withdrawing privileges, such as not allowing them to go down the town or watch their favourite television programme. I always feel that it's not good to stop children doing their activities, like dancing, so I wouldn't have prevented them doing that. An extra task was always a good one too. I'd maybe get them to do someone else's job, such as setting the table or doing the dishes, small things like that. I never used corporal punishment, nor did I see it.
58. There were no written or unwritten codes of conduct or rules for behaviour. It wasn't a school and I think it's important to say that. The conduct expected was the standard you would want for any child. It wasn't formally set out. They learned together through interaction, communication and just being there in the home
59. The sort of behaviour they'd have been disciplined for would be the usual things children do, squabbles probably, fighting over games in the sitting room or while out playing football together. The style I would have been more into would be to sit them down to hear what they had to say and try to sort it out. Or, if someone sort of 'lost the head' a bit, I would maybe just take them with me somewhere to distract them. As I said, I don't remember any great disturbance or behaviours that would worry you. I don't even think they did anything like stealing or any kind of behaviour like that.
60. I have been asked if I required to discipline a child whether that would be recorded in the book I kept. Yes, I think so.

Abuse

61. During my time in Kilmarnock I did not see any behaviour towards children, either amongst themselves or from anyone else, that I considered to be abusive. I never saw anything that I needed to act on.
62. I never got any reports from children of someone hurting them or abusing them. Had I done so, I would have had to pass that on. I have been asked whether there was a set procedure for reporting any concerns. I would have known to report it because I was answerable probably to LGO and to the superior and to social services as well. If I had been worried about anything, I would have said so. If I couldn't have said it to LGO I would have said it to the superior because she had overall responsibility.
63. I have been asked if I felt that my relationship with the children was sufficiently good that they would have been able to tell me had there been anything concerning them. Absolutely, we were very close.
64. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight to what was happening in the home in the seventies, there is nothing I would be concerned about now that I wasn't concerned about then. It really was just a lovely place to be. I think the children were given the best we could have given them at the time.
65. I have never heard of any reports since leaving Kilmarnock, from any residents or anyone else, of concerns or abuse in the home during my time there. I have not been interviewed by the police or the social work department in this connection.

Discharge procedures

66. I'm sure I must have had a child discharged from the care system during my two years in Kilmarnock. A girl called [REDACTED] might have gone home and came back again.
67. I have been asked if there was a particular process in terms of preparing a child for discharge. It would have been talked about with the child and discharge papers would have been signed.
68. I have been asked whether there was any ongoing contact or support from Nazareth House after children went home to their families. That is very much part of what we would have done if a child had gone out to a hostel. We would have done aftercare there. Nobody in Kilmarnock went out to a hostel. I would have remembered doing the aftercare if it had been needed. My experience of our houses is that when the children left they came back to visit us. They knew they'd be welcome if they came back. I don't remember any children in Kilmarnock coming back to visit. The older ones were still there when I left.

Inspections

69. I'm guessing that local authority inspections and visitations by the order happened. Maybe it's a good sign I don't remember any inspections because that probably means we didn't need to do anything differently. Just because I don't recollect any local authority inspections doesn't mean they didn't happen. Certainly we would have had yearly visits from what we would have called our regional superior, and Hammersmith would have visited too.
70. I don't recall seeing any written reports following an inspection or visitation. I would have seen the visitation ones. If I didn't see them, I think [REDACTED] LGO would have talked

to me about what was said in them, especially if there were things that we needed to change.

Records

71. As I said, I kept a book in which I recorded who came to visit the children and what the children did each day. I think we recorded the children's activities because there was an emphasis on ensuring that they had plenty of scope to do different things. I think I also made a record in this book of any punishments given to the children.
72. I don't know what happened to the book when I moved on from Kilmarnock. I wouldn't have taken anything with me, so it should be wherever the rest of the records for the home are kept.

Nazareth House, Aberdeen

73. I had no role or contact with the children in Aberdeen. I lived in the convent and was a full-time student. I went out every day to college, came home, had tea and studied. I was there purely as a student. I did three placements, each of three months, in different parts of the country, so I was fully occupied with being a student, both studying and socialising.
74. I had no impression of what the children's home was like in Aberdeen. We didn't go into other people's place of employment in those days. Now it looks like this would have been a good safeguard, but at the time you didn't freely go to other parts of the house. I don't know who was looking after the children. I actually didn't even know the children were there.
75. I would have prayed together with the sisters who were involved in the care of the children, and I would have had my evening meal with them when I wasn't away on a placement. I do not recall any discussion about anything that was happening in the

children's home. I never heard anything in relation to any issues of discipline or punishment, or any allegations of abuse. I wouldn't have heard anything about the other sisters' employment.

76. I have been asked if I remember meeting Sister [REDACTED] LDX [REDACTED] at Aberdeen. I know the name, but I don't associate her with Aberdeen. Sister [REDACTED] LJJ [REDACTED] was the Sister Superior. She was an English woman.

Other information

77. I have given the Inquiry a photocopy of a letter from the father of two children I looked after in Kilmarnock. His name is [REDACTED]. He and his daughter [REDACTED] came to see me last summer. He says in his letter that I did a "great job with the children". They contacted another former resident, [REDACTED] to tell him that they had traced me and he wrote to me as well. I have given the Inquiry a photocopy of his letter too. [REDACTED] was in Kilmarnock with his two siblings.

78. I have also shown the Inquiry some photographs of the children in my group in Kilmarnock.

79. 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.....

[REDACTED]

Dated.....

26 February 2018

