

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Sister Oliver Joseph Larkin

Support person present: No

Others present: Denis Moloney, Solicitor and Clyde and Co

1. My name at birth was Elizabeth Larkin. I was known as Sister Oliver Larkin when I joined The Sisters of Nazareth. I have never been known as Sister Oliver Plunkett or any other name. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1936. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

The Sisters of Nazareth

2. I joined The Sisters of Nazareth in January 1954. In November 1955 I was in Plymouth where I stayed until 1957. From April 1957 to April 1959 I did a course in nursery training in Bristol which I completed in April 1959.
3. From April 1959 until January 1962 I worked in Belfast Lodge where I worked doing toddler nursery in the baby home. From January 1962 until November 1970 I also worked in the toddler nursery but in Isleworth where I was the house mother. From November 1970 until February 1971 I relieved a sister who was ill and worked with the children in the home in Oxford.
4. From February 1971 to March 1972 I took a degree in child care training at Langside College in Glasgow during which time I resided at Nazareth House in Cardonald, Glasgow.

5. Thereafter I moved to Nazareth House in Aberdeen where I worked with a group of children from March 1972 until January 1973.
6. After I left Aberdeen I worked in a variety of homes throughout England and Ireland, the last of which was working in Wrexham dealing with elderly people from April 1990 onwards.

Qualifications

7. Over the years I have studied child care and received various certificates in this as well as completing several child care courses. In March 1959 I passed and received The National Nursery Examination Board's Certificate which concerned the theoretical training with children from birth to five years and practical training with children aged three and upwards.
8. In February 1972 I received a Certificate of Qualification in the residential Care of Children having studied for almost ^{one} ~~two~~ years in Langside College in Glasgow and having completed numerous residential courses.
9. In 2002 I was awarded a Lifetime Achievement in Care Award.

Nazareth House, Cardonald – Feb 1971 to March 1972

10. When I was studying at Langside College in Glasgow between February 1971 and March 1972 I resided at Nazareth House in Cardonald, Glasgow. However, I simply resided there while studying at the college and took nothing to do with the day to day running of the home.
11. When I completed my course in March 1972 I was sent to Nazareth House in Aberdeen to replace a Sister who had left. This wasn't something I volunteered for but, given my qualifications, I did want to work with children and knew it was likely that I would be given such a posting by my Order.

12. I don't recall any interview before going to Aberdeen. I was simply posted to that position. That is the way of religious life; you go where you are told. I was not aware of any vetting of me.

Nazareth House Aberdeen

13. Nazareth House in Aberdeen was a big institution with a hostel attached to it and it was to this hostel that I was posted. It was basically an annex to the main building and was a very homely place.
14. When I first arrived there I was shown around Nazareth House and was put in the hostel as the sister who had been there had left. That was why there was a vacancy. I don't recall her name and never met her.
15. I had fourteen children there who were mostly girls. The same children remained with me in the hostel throughout the ten months I was there and there were no new intakes during that time. If any of them had family in the main building then they sometimes would go there to visit them or vice versa.
16. There were twin boys aged five as well as their two older sisters who were eight and nine. I think these boys were there to keep them with their older sisters and because there was no room in the main building. I think that's why all those children were in the hostel, lack of room in the main building.
17. We were very much independent from the main building. None of the sisters in the main building had anything to do with those of us that worked and lived in the hostel. We looked after ourselves.
18. We had a little yard at the back where we did our own laundry and hung it out. The dining room was on one side with the sitting room on the other. The bedrooms were upstairs and we tried to keep families together. I can't recall how many bedrooms we had.

19. The twin boys shared a bedroom and their sisters shared another. The oldest girl in the hostel was sixteen. Her name was [REDACTED] She was lovely. Her name is the only name I recall and that is only because I met her a few years later when she was studying at university.
 20. We had a kitchenette next to the dining room though our main meals were sent over from the main building. The staff would go over and collect it. We made our own breakfast.
 21. I had two women who came in in the mornings to help me with breakfast and getting the younger children ready. I was the only nun who worked in the hostel and had almost no contact with the nuns in the main building. The two women who came in to help me were mother and daughter.
 22. The mother normally came in in the morning while the daughter would come in later to help with the cleaning. One or the other would be there if I was away at prayers or the like.
 23. I reported to The Mother Superior, Sister McCarten who stayed in the main building. I had no involvement whatsoever with the main building and The Mother superior preferred us not to have contact with them.
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24. I didn't have anybody who mentored me but the children all had social workers who would come in to see them. I suppose after finishing the course I thought I knew it all.

Routine in the hostel Nazareth House, Aberdeen

25. The school bus came at 8:30 am so the children had to be up, washed, dressed and have had breakfast by that time. When they got up I would be at morning prayers which is why one of the women came in early in the morning to help the children.

26. I had a few teenagers who were able to get themselves ready.
27. At weekends the children would get up slightly later. The children didn't go to prayers in the morning.

Washing

28. There was a bath and a shower. The children would go for either a shower or bath at different times though the younger children were usually first. I would help the young twin boys who loved being bathed together. No child ever bathed in dirty water. The water was always fresh.

Food

29. The food was very good and I always made sure that the children got a lot of fruit. I ate with the other nuns in the refectory while one of the two women who helped me would supervise the children at mealtimes. On a Saturday night we would have a fry up in the hostel which was a good way for the older children to learn how to cook.
30. If the children didn't like something then I would get them something else. For instance, some of them didn't like porridge so I got them cereal instead.

Clothes

31. The children had their own clothes which, in those days, were bought in bulk. There was a room that had a lot of clothes including kilts and spare uniforms for school. I recall on one occasion that four of the children were going on a trip with the school so I took them to C&A to kit them out for the trip. I don't think the children shared clothes or wore 'hand me downs'.

Chores

32. On a Saturday the older children made their beds. Me and the two women who helped me did everything else. The two women were marvellous. The children didn't need to do chores. The children would sometimes help dry the dishes but that was it as far as chores were concerned.

Leisure time

33. There was a TV and books and magazines. The children always knew the programmes they wanted to watch and I always encouraged the children to read. They had a lot of nice toys and games. Often these would have been brought in by their parents or donated by big firms in Aberdeen at Christmas.

Possessions and pocket money

34. The children had their own lockers and cupboards where they kept their own property. They got pocket money each week and would spend it as they liked on a Saturday.

Trips

35. We all went out to the park a lot but I don't recall going to the cinema or to pantomimes. During the ten months I was there four of the teenage children went to, I think, Belgium on a school trip. During the holidays I would take the children to the beach and I recall that we took a lot of photos.
36. Also, the home hired a hostel in the Highlands that summer and we took up beds and sleeping bags and stayed there for a fortnight. We had good weather and had a great time up there.

Birthdays and Christmas

37. At Christmas time the older children decorated the hostel in the way they wanted and we had a full Christmas dinner that was sent over from the main building. The children would write letters to Santa.
38. Some of the big firms were very good to the children and would donate presents and would sometimes organise a party for them. We would wrap up the presents and, where possible, we would try to get each child the present they had asked for or as close as possible.
39. Whenever one of the children had a birthday I would make a party buffet and would get them a present. Sometimes relatives would come round and take them out.

Bed-wetting

40. If a child was needing attention during the night then I would deal with it. One of the boys had a problem with bed-wetting. I would wake him up before I went to bed and take him to the toilet. Sometimes we caught it in time and sometimes we didn't. If he had wet the bed I would wash him and give him fresh pyjamas and remake his bed.

Schooling

41. A bus picked the children up at 8:30 am and took them to school. Mrs Shaw was the headmistress at the primary school but I don't recall the name of the school though it must have been the local Catholic school. At night the children would do their homework in the dining room.

Healthcare

42. If any of the children were sick I would call a doctor. There was also a form that the social work required us to fill in whenever the children needed medical attention. A

doctor and a dentist would come in to see the younger children but I took the older children to a surgery if it was required.

43. All the children had to have a medical examination once a year.
44. One girl tripped and broke her arm so that required a few trips to the local hospital. I remember her passing out when she got the plaster off. I think I had a log book where I recorded such things. Each child had their own file that I kept in the office though I don't recall now where in the hostel my office was.
45. My recollection is that the children liked to keep their hair long and I don't remember ever going to get their hair cut.

Deaths

46. No child ever died during my time in Nazareth House.

Religious instruction

47. The children went to mass every Sunday and I went to prayers every day but the only other time that the children went to mass that I recall was at Christmas. Of course that was midnight mass and I remember the children being desperate to get back to the hostel because Santa was coming.

Visitors

Visits from friends and family

48. Maybe at least one parent would come most weeks. It was a long way for the parents to travel as most of the children were from Glasgow. The children would always look forward to that. I would always speak to the children after they had been out with family and ask them what they had done. I would note what they said in the log book.

49. I remember that the father of the twin boys and their sisters was very good at visiting. He would come every week and take them all out to the town.

Visits from social workers and reviews

50. If official visitors came to the main building they would also visit us in the hostel and ask how the children were doing. Our counsellor from The Order's HQ came for a week during my time there. She had no complaints about how I ran the hostel.
51. We met with social workers regularly to see how the children were getting on. It would always be noted in the children's file that social work had attended.

Access to the children

52. I can't think of any occasion that any of the children would have been left with anybody without somebody they knew being there.

Children leaving Nazareth House

53. During the ten months that I was in the hostel no new children arrived there. Nor did any of them leave. The fourteen children that were there when I arrived were the same fourteen that were there when I left. I didn't know what the procedure was for children arriving and leaving the home other than one of the parents would be brought up to arrange things..

Records and record keeping

54. I kept the records on everything concerning the children and these would be used for reviews with the social workers. The younger of the two women who helped me would have had access to the records I had mainly because things might happen when I wasn't there and she would have to update the records.

Discipline and punishment

55. I don't know about what happened in the main building but I don't think we ever had to discipline any of the children in the hostel. They were great kids and it broke my heart when I had to leave. They were really sad when I left.

Abuse in Nazareth House, Aberdeen.

56. I can say for sure that the children in the hostel were never the subject of any form of abuse. The children were lovely. We were like a family and I was very protective of them.
57. With regards to what happened in the main building, I would not be aware of what happened there as the only time I was there would when I sometimes went over at mealtimes. I never saw anything untoward as I was too busy with my own group.
58. I am aware that the Inquiry has received reports of abuse in the main building and if what happened was as described then I would certainly be of the view that that would be considered abuse.
59. I was never the subject of a complaint of any sort while I was in Aberdeen. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
60. Sister [REDACTED] LFB has since passed away. I'm not aware of her having any other names. She was great. She could drive and used to take the children to the doctors or wherever else was required. I don't know how old she was and all I can say is that she was in the main building when I worked in the hostel.
61. I would sometimes see Sister [REDACTED] LFB when we were both on duty on the school bus. We each took turns going on the bus, two of us at a time, and sometimes our

turns would coincide. I don't recall seeing her disciplining anybody on the bus though I was usually on the upper deck.

62. Sister [FAF] had been in charge of the hostel when it had been an industrial school. She had a room in the hostel but I never saw her discipline any of the children. I doubt if she ever had the chance to as she really only slept there.
63. Sister [LTX] was in the main building when I was in the hostel. It was her group that I went to the Highlands with. The little ones seemed to love her and I never saw her discipline anybody. She had her own staff which I had nothing to do with. She would take her turn on the school bus but I never heard of any wrong doing by her.
64. [REDACTED]
65. I wasn't really able to tell them anything because we weren't allowed into each other's groups and the hostel was very much separate from the main building.
66. [FAJ] worked with Sister [LTX] but I had nothing to do with her.

Reporting of abuse at Nazareth House, Aberdeen

67. I don't know if the children in my care could have spoken to anybody if something was wrong. I suppose they could have spoken to the Mother Superior or one of their social workers. It's nothing I ever experienced. None of the children ever made any complaint about me or the way I treated them.
68. There was nothing I ever saw that I thought constituted abuse and would have needed reported.

[Redacted]

69.

[Redacted]

Closing thoughts

70. I am aware that The Inquiry has received information about abuse at the main building in Nazareth House, Aberdeen and I can only suggest that I was unaware of it simply because I was rarely in that building. Also, I was only in Aberdeen for ten months.

71. The reason I moved on from Aberdeen is that there was a sister in Newcastle who was retiring and the religious life being what it is I was sent there by my Order. I'll never forget the day I left. One of the children was trying to pull me coat off begging me not to go.

72. I think, when looking after children, it always depended on the individual as to how they dealt with children. My own mother had died when I was young and I was raised by relatives so I could empathise with children who were far away from their home. I think it was that that made me so wanting to make sure the children in my care got nothing but love.

73. 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 Signature]

Dated.....

May 1st 2018.

