

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Maria LANIGAN

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is Mary Lanigan. I am known as Maria Lanigan. I was born on [REDACTED] 1931. I am 86 years old. I joined the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul on 8 September 1952. My community name was Sister Vincent but it is Sister Maria now. I was known as Sister Vincent when I was at Smyllum, Lanark. I was at Smyllum as the Sister Servant from 1979 to 1981.
2. I had a number of other postings before and after my time at Smyllum. From 1954 to 1955, I was at Tollcross in Glasgow in the care of a nursery group. From 1955 to 1957, I was at St Joseph's in Darlington in the care of a nursery group. From 1957 to 1969, I was at Boston Spa, again in the care of a nursery group. From 1969 to 1971, I was at Commercial Road, London in the nursery day centre. From 1971 to 1979, I was in Boston Spa as Sister Servant/Provincial Councillor. Then, as I've said I was at Smyllum as Sister Superior from 1979 to 1981.
3. After Smyllum, I was at St Catherine's in Lanark from 1981 to 1983 as Sister Servant/Provincial Councillor. From 1983 to 1986, I was at Tollcross in Glasgow as Sister Servant/Provincial Councillor. From 1986 to 1987, I was at Easterhouse in Glasgow as Sister Servant/Provincial Councillor. From 1987 to 1990, I was at St Joseph's in Rosewell as Sister Servant. From 1990 to 1996, I was at Provincial House, Mill Hill in London as Sister Servant. From 1996 to 1999, I was at Caerphilly, providing pastoral care for the deaf in Cardiff. From 1999 to 2001, I was at Caerphilly as Sister Servant and providing pastoral care for the deaf in Cardiff. From 2001 to 2005, I was in Ely, Cardiff, as Sister Servant and providing pastoral care for the deaf. From 2005 to 2006, I was temporarily in Sheffield providing pastoral care. Since

2006 to the present day, I have been in St Vincent's in Southport, supporting older sisters.

4. I did my National Nursery examination body qualification before I entered the Daughters of Charity. That would have been in 1949 I think. I don't have a copy of my certificate for that.

Smyllum, Lanark

5. In 1979, I was sent to Smyllum to close it. The Provincial Council that I was on at that time, decided that that was what was going to happen and I went up to close it. There were 4 or 5 elderly sisters in Smyllum at that time. I had to bring them down to St. Catherine's in Lanark and tell them what was happening. We had a house there, St. Catherine's in Lanark. That was my main reason to go to Smyllum, to close it and bring the sisters to St Catherine's. There was also one member of staff, Bernise, who had nowhere to go. I remember going with her to try and get her a flat and there was nothing, so we brought her back to St. Catherine's and she stayed with us when Smyllum closed.
6. The elderly sisters were sisters had worked in Smyllum. I remember [REDACTED] was one and [REDACTED] was one. I can't remember the others.
7. I am asked why Smyllum was to be closed at that time. Well, you had the huge big building and it was only myself and the elderly sisters in it. The children had houses attached to the huge big building but there were no children in the house as far as I can remember at that stage. They'd all been moved out of the big house. They had previously been in the big house. The big house had been the orphanage. I had never been to Smyllum before I was placed there in 1979.
8. I didn't know much about Smyllum before I arrived there, except that the children had to be there for some reason because of difficulties at home. Children would only be in orphanages because there were some difficulties and they had to be placed there.

Other Sisters

9. I remember some of the sisters that were there when I arrived at Smyllum. Sister [REDACTED] AEG was one I remember very specially, because she was so upset because it was closing. She had had those children maybe from a young age and to lose them then, for them to just go like that, it wasn't easy. So she was still there, and [REDACTED] IAG [REDACTED] AHM was another sister there but she is not in the community anymore. She left quite recently, I think she was having to look after a family member or something like that.
10. I'm asked if [REDACTED] AEG was also known as Sister [REDACTED] AEG. I only knew her as [REDACTED] AEG but I don't know.
11. I was the Sister Superior. I can't remember who I replaced there at all. I was literally sent because they couldn't keep this huge building any longer. What I was sent there to do was to close it down, and that was what I had to do.
12. [REDACTED] AEG had a group, [REDACTED] AHM had a group, and [REDACTED] IAG had a group. I can't remember everything. It's going back so long. And as I say, my focus was on being able to close the house and get out of this huge big building.

The Children

13. I'm asked about the numbers of children who were there. Well, I presume the numbers had gone down by then. They used to be in the big house so then when the numbers went down and down I suppose it made it into smaller groups. I don't have a clue what the numbers were when I was there, I'd be just taking a guess.
14. I'm asked if, as Sister Superior, I had an office in Smyllum. I think I did have some kind of room. I had a bedroom, I know, because when I came back one night it was flooded out. I came from Manchester from a meeting and the place was flooded. It was a huge big building like a castle. During the day I just had a wee office. I can't remember much. I mean my focus was looking after those elderly sisters and trying to manage them and get the other place opened for them.

15. As far as I'm aware, there were boys and girls at Smyllum when I arrived. I can't remember if there were very small children or how old the children were. In terms of uniforms, unless they were going up to school with the uniforms, I don't remember. It was just the school uniforms. I'm sure they must have had school uniforms. I don't remember anything about the clothes the children wore when they weren't in school. I suppose my concern wasn't the children. You know, they were being looked after and they weren't my concern as much as the house and the elderly sisters; the elderly sisters were my concern.
16. I don't think we were taking any new children in Smyllum when I was there. The idea was to get the children there re-housed.
17. I didn't know anything about the daily routines of the children. I wasn't involved in going into the dormitories or anything like that.
18. I don't know anything about the bathing and washing for the children. I had absolutely nothing to do with the children. As I say, I was on the Council, my work was outside, and I was just kind of living there to look after these elderly sisters.
19. In terms of when I would see the children, I would only see them if they were around. I mean, I never went into the groups or anything. I am asked if I would see children in the playground or anything like that. Well I suppose in the playground, yes. I suppose that there was ground for them to play in I guess, yes. I never went on any trips with the children.
20. I was also not involved in the schooling of the children in any way. I do not know anything about that.
21. I didn't have anything to do with their healthcare or medical care either. The social workers were involved as well, I had nothing to do with the children, as I say the children were not my concern.

22. I am asked what happened if a sister had a concern about a child that she wanted to discuss with me, as mother superior. I had no interest in or knowledge of the children. I don't remember if any of the sisters did come to me with any concern of the children. They were all capable people looking after the children.

Deaths

23. No children died at Smullym when I was there. I don't what the procedures were if a child did die. I suppose we would just have to look at that if it did happen but I don't remember anything.
24. I am asked if there was a procedure for reporting the deaths of children to the authorities or to central government. I would have thought that would be the normal thing if a child did die. I mean, there must have been some kind of procedure but I don't know as there was no child who died while I was there. There probably would have been a procedure. I would have been told and I would have been part of it if it had happened. But I don't remember if there was a particular policy or anything like that.

Religion

25. I am asked if I saw the children in the chapel or at mass or anything like that. Yes I did. We had a chapel. I can't remember whether they went to the parish church because there was a parish. I don't think they came in to the chapel, actually. We just really had mass in the chapel for ourselves. I'm trying to remember. It's not easy.

Christmas

26. I am asked about Christmas and how that was celebrated at Smyllum. It's the one thing I think I must have seen, the presents the children got. Because, I remember that I was overwhelmed with what they got. Maybe I went around the groups to wish them a happy Christmas. But that stands out, the amount of presents they got. I don't know who the presents were from.

Parents/families

27. I am asked if, as Mother Superior, I had anything to do the children's' parents or families. I didn't. I don't know about visits from family.

Inspections

28. I am asked about inspections. I don't know if inspectors or other officials visited while I was at Smyllum. I had nothing to do with them, if they did. I can't remember if there were any but I certainly wasn't brought into it. I can't remember any inspection of the home as a whole. I am also asked about inspections or visits for particular children from particular areas. I can't remember either of those. But I would imagine the sister in charge of the children would help with it. I can't remember inspection reports of any kind being sent to me as Mother Superior. I am asked where such reports would have been stored if we did receive them, and where other important documents would be kept. I don't know. I honestly don't remember anything about that. I am sorry, but it's going back a long time. Basic information about the children went to St Catherine's and then to Mill Hill in London.
29. I am asked if I remember anything about visits or checks from the Catholic Welfare Society. No I don't.

Moving children on

30. In terms of arranging places where the children were going to go when the home closed, it was the other sisters, and I presume the social workers, who dealt with that.

Discipline and punishment

31. I am asked if there were any codes of conduct that I remember in relation to discipline or punishment while I was Mother Superior at Smyllum. I don't know anything about that. I can't remember any written codes of conduct or any written or unwritten rules about discipline.

32. I am told that the Inquiry has heard that on some occasions sisters would take children to the Mother Superior and speak to the Mother Superior if there was a difficulty with a child or a child had maybe behaved in an inappropriate way. That never happened while I was mother superior. I never had a child brought to me. I never disciplined a child while I was at Smyllum.
33. I am asked if I saw children being disciplined by sisters or staff. I didn't. I know I am being very vague, but it's just that I wasn't part of the children's set up.
34. I don't know if a punishment book was kept. I didn't keep a punishment book.

Abuse

35. While I was there, I didn't see any behaviour that I considered to be abuse of children. I was never called on by the sisters. I mean, they dealt with the children. I was never called on to come to them or anything. I didn't see anything that I thought was abuse myself and I wasn't aware of anything like that happening.
36. While I was at Smyllum, I didn't see any children being slapped. I am asked if there was corporal punishment at Smyllum when I was there. I don't know. It sounds awful but I just didn't have anything to do with the children. I was there for the sisters and the moving of the house. If the children were slapped, I wouldn't know about it. I wouldn't know but certainly I can't believe that that sort of treatment would be getting by.
37. I am asked if a child ever came and spoke to me about anything, to share any concern with me. No, they didn't. It seems awful but I didn't have any involvement with children. I had too many other things that I was having to deal with. No child ever came to knock on my door or to share anything with me.
38. I don't remember any child being admitted to hospital while I was there. They could have been admitted. I don't remember it happening. I'm asked if that's the kind of thing I might hear of. Oh yes, a sister would tell me that.

39. I'm asked what I would have done if I had seen someone doing something to a child which I thought was abuse. I would have probably told the sister that that wasn't the kind of thing to do. But I don't remember that happening. That's the honest truth, I don't remember seeing anything.
40. If I had seen something like that which caused me concern, I would have looked out the sister and found out exactly what had happened. That wasn't the kind of behaviour that went on. I never had that experience.
41. With the benefit of hindsight also, I don't consider that I saw anything that was abusive to children.

Allegations

42. I have been informed that allegations have been made and I am asked about some children.

[REDACTED]

43. I am asked if I remember a boy called [REDACTED]. I don't remember him. I am told that he may have been at Smyllum from 1969 until 1980. So, he may have crossed with my time.
44. I am told that he has said he was beaten by nuns, and that he was told his mother was dead when she wasn't actually dead and that she died two years later, but when he was told that she died, he was surprised because he had already been told two years before that she had died and that he has said he was beaten up for being sick at night time.
45. I am told that [REDACTED] has said that [REDACTED] was caring and would try and help but that [REDACTED] BAC [REDACTED], was the complete opposite and ruled with fear and never missed a thing, that he was violent to the boys if they didn't do what he said. I am told he has said of [REDACTED] BAC [REDACTED] that, "*even the nuns feared him*" and,

"he hated me from a young age and made it known by getting me into trouble with everything I done if it wasn't to his liking and he would threaten me and get the other boys to beat me and if they didn't he'd beat them and this went on for years. He promised one man he would get rid of him if he didn't stop befriending me. This man went to Sister Vincent about him but nothing was said, the threats got worse and I feared for my life more and more".

46. I don't know anything about what is being said. I don't remember anyone coming to me with any such concerns.

June Smith

47. I am asked if I remember a child called June Smith. I don't.

48. I am told that June Smith has said that [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] was in charge of her house and that [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] *"would come into the room in the morning. She would ask if anyone had wet the bed. There was no need for her to ask as she could smell it when she walked in to the room. She used to pull me out of bed. She would dig her knuckles in the top of my head. She made me strip the bed. Sister [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] would then run me a bath. She would throw liquid disinfectant over me. It would sting. My skin would be all red where the disinfectant had hit my skin. Sister [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] told me to put talcum powder on it. She would stand over me the whole time I was in the bath."*

49. I don't know anything about that.

50. I am told that June Smith has said that [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] would make her wash the sheets just before 9 o'clock when all the other kids were walking up to school and would make her hang her sheets out so that everyone knew she had wet the bed. I can't believe that. I just don't know anything about that.

51. I am told that June Smith has said that she wet the bed on a trip to Holy Island and that [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] threw her into the shower and made the civilian staff stand

over her and watch her, and that June Smith was naked and that [REDACTED] AEG turned away and laughed as she walked out. Again, I don't know anything about that.

52. I am told that June Smith has said that [REDACTED] gave her a book and that [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] AEG dragged her out of bed and hit her for reading. I don't know anything about that.

53. I am told that June Smith has said that she was battered by [REDACTED] AEG for telling another child that [REDACTED] AEG had forgotten her birthday. I never heard anything like that. I have never heard anything about [REDACTED] AEG battering children.

54. I am told that June Smith has said that [REDACTED] AEG got June Smith into trouble for not telling her she had started her period and June Smith was not supplied with sanitary towels. I don't know anything about that. I am told that June Smith has said that [REDACTED] AEG would take personal possessions from her. I've never heard that.

55. I am told that June Smith has said that [REDACTED] AEG locked her out of the house one night and that she was left to stand in the porch without wearing any socks until 11.30pm and she was all wet. I am told she has said that all the abuse was physical that she was hit all the time, that [REDACTED] AEG would take her upstairs to the staff room and hit her with a clothes brush or a belt, and that she would be hit on the body, on the back or the sides over her clothes and that this happened two or three times a week. Again, I've never heard anything like that.

56. I am told that she has said she was slapped and pulled by the hair by [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] AEG for losing her glasses and that she saw other children being hit by [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] AEG

57. I am told that she has said that, "*When Sister [REDACTED] AEG went on holiday, Sister Vincent would look after us. She was really nice. She didn't make a fuss when you wet the bed. She would run you a warm bath and clean the sheets for you. She did not punish us.*"

58. That wasn't me. I didn't have anything to do with the children. I have no recollection of looking after the children.

AAN

59. I don't remember a child called AAN I am told that he may have been there until 1979. I don't remember him. I am told that he has said that he was forced to drink sour milk and that if he was sick he was made to pick up his own vomit and eat it. I can hardly bear to hear it. I don't know anything about that.

60. I am told that he has said that he had his toenails and fingernails cut to the quick which made them bleed and that he had to pick lice out of other children's hair, and that if he was found speaking or doing anything else wrong he was beaten and he had to wash with DTT and carbolic soap. I am told that he has said that if there was any noise at night, and one of the nuns heard and got up and she didn't have her hair covered, that he would get beaten for seeing her hair. I do not remember anything like that.

BAC

61. I remember BAC was there and I had a lot to do with but I had nothing to do with BAC I don't remember anything about what is being said about him, or anything about anybody coming to me with concerns. I know I had a lot to do with because of the moving things out of Smyllum, he helped me. But I just thought BAC took the children for football and that sort of thing.

AEG

62. I think the allegations about AEG are a pack of lies. I couldn't imagine AEG doing any of that. I just couldn't take that in about AEG because of the person she was. I was always blamed for closing it because she was so upset, but no way would she treat a child like that.

Practices/regime

63. I understand that the Inquiry has information about practices and regimes which are said to have been taking place at Smyllum over the years, like discipline for bedwetting, children having to put the soiled sheets on their head, children being force-fed, children being beaten, including severe beatings. I wasn't aware of any of these things when I was there, nothing. It's insane to me, all this. If these kinds of things did happen, of course I would accept they were abusive.

Prior Statements

64. I previously provided a statement to the solicitors for Daughters of Charity a few months ago. I have been shown a copy of my statement dated 14 July 2017 and confirm that is what I'm talking about. In that statement, I say that I was told that there were specific allegations made against Sister [REDACTED] AGI but that I never lived with her. That is correct. I was never at Smyllum at the same time as her.

65. I have never been spoken to by the police about Smyllum.

Who the children could speak to

66. I am asked who a child at Smyllum, while I was there, could have told if they were being abused and whether there was any opportunity for them to tell. I suppose they would have come to me if something that desperate had happened. But I honestly don't remember any child coming to me or any staff coming to me or anything.

67. If a child had come to me with that sort of thing, in terms of what I would have done, I suppose I would have got in touch with my own superiors for advice.

Records

68. I'm asked about where records were kept while I was at Smyllum such as admissions registers. I don't remember where they were kept. We've been trying to think this up. I vaguely remember that what was there was taken down to St.

Catherine's when we closed. Things like that would have been taken out of the house and I have a vague remembrance about that they went down to St. Catherine's because anything that we had went down to St. Catherine's, or we got rid of furnishings and things like that. I have a vague remembrance of information being taken down to St. Catherine's and being kept in a cupboard there somewhere.

69. I don't remember particular records about inspections or disciplines or punishments. I think it was just the children's names or something like that. Some kind of information about the children. I can't remember if they were kept in the Mother Superior's office. They would have been kept somewhere.

Conclusion – helping the Inquiry

70. I am asked if I can explain why certain allegations are being made, if I think they cannot be true, for example about [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED]. I can't believe it. I don't know. I don't honestly know why children would say things like that if they didn't happen. I can't imagine anything like that happening and as I say with [REDACTED] AEG [REDACTED] she was so upset that it was closing because she had had some of those children for so long that they were like family. If the things didn't happen, the things that are being alleged, I don't honestly know why it is being said they did. I'm trying to get things clear in my mind. The reason the children were in Smyllum was because they came from broken homes, or there was some reason for them to be put into an orphanage like that. I wonder if there was cruelty before they came in. It baffles me that people are saying things like this because I honestly and truthfully don't think they are true. I can't imagine.

71. I understand that some people may have told the Inquiry that they are affected still, now, by abuse they suffered in Smyllum, that they have on-going effects. I'm asked if I can explain that, if the allegations aren't true. I'm finding it so hard to understand that that treatment went on in a Daughter of Charity house. I find it really hard.

72. 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.....29.9.17.....