

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

William CONNELLY

Support person present: Yes – wife [REDACTED]

1. My name is William Francis Connelly. I am known as Bill. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1948. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. [REDACTED] grew up in a house in Coatbridge. My mother died when I was three years old.

3. My father, [REDACTED], who I prefer to refer to as my “old man”, was an abusive person. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

4. When I was about eight years old, the police arrived at the house and took my old man away. There was only him and I in the house at that time. We were taken to the police station and I was placed in a cell.

5. I returned to the house and my brother [REDACTED] arrived soon after. He looked after us while dad was sent to prison.

Smyllum, Lanark

6. I was about eight or nine the day I was taken away by a woman dressed all in black. [REDACTED] She did not tell us who she was or why we were being taken away. She just sat in the front of the car beside the driver and said nothing. I thought I was being taken away because of what my father did.

Routine at Smyllum

First day

7. On arrival, I remember going through the gates with the big pillars. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
8. The one and only time I was shown any compassion at Smyllum was that first day. I was being walked over the cobbled area. A staff member, not a nun, approached and she said, "you look like you will be one of mine". I thought it was because of my age. The nun I was walking with told her I was being placed in St Anthony's dormitory. The staff member gave me a hug and that was the last I ever saw of her.
9. I was taken to the store cupboard and issued with my set of clothes. They were clean but not new clothes. I was taken to the dormitory and stayed there until I was settled. After a short time, I went to the dining room for the first time. Still no one told me who they were or why I was there.
10. St Anthony's dormitory where I stayed, was situated up the stairs. When you entered the dormitory, there was a large open area with some tables. After the tables was the bed area with about thirty beds. They were laid out in pairs with the head of one bed at the foot of the next. There was a small room near the entrance to the dormitory where the nuns stayed. There was a hatch in the door where she would watch us.

11. Sister [REDACTED] AGI was the nun in charge of our dormitory and she was nice. She would only punish you if you did something wrong. There was another “wee woman” who helped Sister [REDACTED] AGI. She definitely was not nice and would hit us regularly.

Mornings and bedtime

12. About seven o'clock we were woken. One of the staff would go through the dormitory making a noise to make sure we were awake. After we washed and dressed we said our prayers at our beds, then headed for breakfast.
13. Usually at night it was the nuns or the “wee woman” who put you to bed. Once in bed I was happy as I knew there were no more punishments coming my way.
14. For a short time when I was at Smyllum, I suffered from bed wetting. I prayed at night, hoping to wake in the morning having not wet the bed. The nuns and staff would check the beds in the morning. The “wee woman” would give you a few belts with her hands for wetting the bed. She would call you a dirty animal.
15. The sheets were hung over a lintel in the room and sometimes they were still hanging there when you returned at night. When you wet the bed you went to the store room and were issued with clean sheets. The nun there would be aware of why you needed the sheets and she too would give you a belt.
16. The bed wetting was a common occurrence in Smyllum. There was never any help given to you to overcome this problem. There was no help given to the kids for anything in general, just punishments.

Bathing

17. Baths were a weekly thing at Smyllum. In the room for bathing were lots of cubicles with no doors. There was a trough that ran the length of the hall and this was where we bathed. Everyone used the same water.

Food

18. I don't recall much about the food at Smyllum other than I knew you ate it all or you would go hungry.
19. I remember one night having come out of the bath and I was combing my hair. Two nuns from a different part of Smyllum were supervising us. As I combed my hair, one of them asked me something which I did not hear. She was angry with me and forced me onto the floor. She started cutting at my hair with scissors. I put my hands up to try and stop her, but ended up with several cuts during the struggle. The second nun assisted in holding my hands while the first nun continued to cut my hair. She kept digging at my scalp with the scissors causing more cuts to my head. Both nuns were punching and kicking at me as I tried to protect myself from the onslaught.
20. As a result of the injuries, I spent time in the isolation ward and there was something around my head for the wounds. I can remember the nuns would take me to the sinks to clean the wounds. They would scrape all the scabs from the wounds causing me to bleed again. It was hurting a lot and I tried to protect myself but this only resulted in me being hit again. I was not allowed to be seen by anyone and my meals were brought to me at the ward.

School

21. The primary school I attended was within Smyllum. There were about six different classrooms in the school. I was good at school and loved being there. The Head nun at that time was Sister [REDACTED] and she was good to us. Some of the other nuns taught there and other teachers were brought in from the outside. I went to the school a couple of years before being moved to the high school.
22. I was good at school and I was moved to a higher class. The teachers from the outside seemed surprised by my achievements, but there was no encouragement from the nuns themselves.

23. In Smyllum, there was a large quadrangle which was supposed to be a playground for the boys. I don't remember any of us playing. There were no kids games played and there were no balls or any such thing to play with. The girls had a separate area. This was the same for everything in Smyllum apart from school. The boys and girls were not allowed to mix. There was a metal roundabout in the boys area, but as it was near the windows where the nuns were observing us, no-one played on it. That was my interpretation.
24. If it rained, we were kept in the play hall inside Smyllum. There were fixed benches all round this hall. Again, no-one played and we were told to just stay in there.
25. Opposite Smyllum was a piece of land with a football pitch. [REDACTED] BAC looked after the football pitches and I played there probably three times while I stayed at Smyllum.

Holidays/Trips

26. There was one holiday and I went to Aberfoyle for two weeks. One other day I was allowed out to Lanark to watch the floats during the parade on the gala day.
27. [REDACTED]
We went to Lanark Loch and were out on the boats. It was great as no nuns were around.

Birthdays and Christmas

28. Birthdays were not celebrated at Smyllum. I remember on one occasion I was given a parcel and there was a card with it. The nuns would tell us it came from our new "aunty". They made you write back to the so called "aunty" and they would feel guilty and donate money to the orphanage. If you refused to fill in the card you were punished. The toy was never removed from the box and we never saw it again.
29. The only celebration of Christmas was at the chapel. The meal was different from any other during the year. There were no presents given out and nothing joyous

about the day. We never went outside Smyllum for any parties and none were held there.

Visits/Inspections

30. There were never any visits from the social workers or any independent visitors. I have worked in the prison service and you recognise any strangers that visit. I can say no strangers came to see us at Smyllum.
31. My old man came for a visit on one occasion while he was in custody. I was taken to a room by one of the nuns. When he was there, he was in kept in handcuffs with two police officers. He never stayed long.

Healthcare

32. Although I can't recall being ill, I still never saw any doctor when I was treated for any injuries. There were no visits from any dentists while I was there.

Religion

33. As well as having to say our prayers each morning in the dormitory, we attended Mass each Sunday. We would say prayers for different people in the world and different saints. I can recall having to say prayers that Kennedy would be elected President, so it was probably around November 1960.
34. Eventually, I became an altar boy at the church and attended there every day. I learned to repeat everything at Mass in Latin. Although I repeated the words, I never learnt the meaning. If you got it wrong, the nuns would rap you across the knuckles.
35. I remember being in the chapel one day. The boys were always separated from the girls. I tried to sneak a look round at my sister and could see she was mouthing something to me but I could not understand her.

36. As the service ended, I was taken to the office by Sister EAD. She sat at her desk and I knew where she made us stand. Her only words were, "your brother was killed in a road accident". She didn't even answer me, probably because she didn't know or more likely she didn't care.
37. I remember getting ready to go to the funeral. I was taken to the clothes store and given a blue blazer with green piping for the service. When we returned to Smyllum, the clothes were taken away and I dressed in my other clothes.

Chores

38. When I was at Smyllum for some time I was tasked with looking after the young children and babies in the nursery. I would help wash them, change their nappies and ensure they were fed. I was able to acquire some food when I was completing this chore.
39. I can remember doing some work at a farm. We went there on the tractor and trailer. I picked potatoes during the school holidays. I was paid a pound for my time. One of the older kids took me to Lanark to spend the money. I bought a torch and a lollipop and we had a roll and sausage at the café.
40. As we were separated in the playground I sneaked the lollipop to . The other kids started shouting "Billy Connelly goes with ". The nuns heard this and that was another reason for them to punish me.
41. I remember being given the belt at school one day. was sat at the front of the class. When the teacher gave me the belt I put my hands behind my back. When I did this reached out and touched my hand. I wanted to get the belt again.

Abuse at Smyllum

42. When the nuns were busy or there were staff shortages, a couple of the older boys from St Joseph's dormitory would be left in charge of us as we got ready for bed. On the tables in the dormitory the boys laid out sticks of varying thickness. They would find any reason for you having done something wrong. You were made to choose which of the sticks you were to be struck with. The thicker the stick, the more times you were struck. I chose the thicker stick as it did not cause as much pain as the thin one. The thin one they could get a whip action from it.
43. One of the priests taught us that when we say Mass, we had to be pure. Sometimes he would make us undress. He would cuddle us from the front and from the rear. If you complained, he hit you. Even if you had been to confession he wanted you to repeat it. He would be angry if you told him nothing. When you went into the confession box he would masturbate while he listened to your confession.
44. Sister **EAD** was the worst of the nuns because of her regular beatings. She enjoyed hitting us. I remember her boots because she was always kicking us with them.
45. One day, she hit me with a hair brush. She must have carried it with her. I tried to protect myself from the beatings but there was so much venom in her face. I would ask why she was beating me but she never said a word, just kept hitting me. Throughout my time at Smyllum she was the one who beat me the most regularly.
46. A lot of the nuns hit me and the other kids. It was not just the nuns as some of the other staff would also hit us, just not as often.
47. **BAC** was the **[REDACTED]** and always wore **[REDACTED]**. He sometimes ran the football team. He was an angry and aggressive man. Each time I saw him he gave me a couple of digs. There was a recess between the radiators and the benches. He said something about being in the wrong place and got so angry. I managed to get into the recess where he couldn't reach me. When he did hit you, it was with so much force it was like he was hitting another grown man.

48. All the staff were aware of the abuse carried out on the children. They would have to have been in an isolated office and have never left it to miss all the abuse that went on.
49. You got so used to the beatings. There was never any compassion and no-one took any interest in you. They didn't care. I could have put up with the beatings if there was some love shown as well. That never happened.

Leaving Smyllum

50. When my father was due to be released from prison, my brother came to Smyllum and took me back to the family house. They put me back into the environment where he was free to batter me again.

Reporting of abuse at Smyllum

51. I never reported any of the abuse at Smyllum. No-one would listen to me. If I were to try and report it while I was there it would mean more beatings. There were no opportunities to talk about it with anyone because no-one came.

Langbank

52. After I was in Smyllum, I was placed in Langbank. It was only for about two weeks. It was a Catholic institution. It was where poor kids went for holidays. I got a few belts there. It was from the priest, nuns and staff. I never done anything wrong but still got him by them.

Life after being in care

53. After Smyllum and staying with my father, I ran away a few times but did not know how to cope. One time I slept in a car in a junk yard and I was freezing. I saw a police car and pretended to run away. I deliberately fell so they would catch me. They took me back to the station where I was fed and kept warm.
54. School always finished at three fifty and that was the time my father instructed I was to be home by. There was no way I could get there in time and this meant he beat me for being late. He would make me strip and stand there until he was ready to punish me. He used his belt to hit me with. I would try and run away to my brothers. They were so scared of him, they took me back to his house.
55. My old man and me hitchhiked to Birmingham and stayed near to my brother [REDACTED]. For a while we stayed with [REDACTED] but he eventually left and it was me and the old man. Whenever I was leaving school, he would hide and spy on me just to make sure I went home.
56. When we stayed in Kidderminster, I was working with carpets. I cut my toe on some carpets and ended up at the hospital. When I got home, he beat me for being so late.
57. After Smyllum and running away from my father, I had many jobs. I never stayed in one place for any length of time. I kept running away from everything and everyone. Since I married we have stayed in seventeen different houses. I was afraid people would want to know too much. I have known lots of people in my life but I have few that I can call close friends.
58. I met a guy who was a teacher and a priest or something similar. I was jealous of them and others because of their education. I couldn't compete and kicked the priest in the shin. The teacher taught me about the power of education which led me on a qualification kick.

59. I became a trainer and an NVQ assessor. Since then, I have always worked. I have been to university three times, the first time I was thirty eight years old.
60. I volunteered with NACRO for a while and I was eventually offered a job with them. After being with NACRO for some time, they put me in touch with the Probation Service and I worked in their office for NACRO. A couple of months later, I was offered a full time post with them.
61. I met my wife, [REDACTED] in Birmingham. Not long afterwards, I moved back to Scotland. She discovered I had left but managed to find out where I was and followed me. We got married not long after. Just before we married, I took her to Scotland to meet my old man. She never liked him and he died a couple of weeks later.
62. When I met my [REDACTED] I still had many issues. Even though I did not want to lose her, I kept pushing and testing her, just to get her to prove she loved me. We came out the other end and have been together since.
63. [REDACTED] and I have two kids, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I have a grandchild with [REDACTED] and two step-grandchildren. [REDACTED] stays near us but is soon moving to [REDACTED]

Impact

64. While in Smyllum, you never really got pally with anyone. As a result of this, I never got too close to anyone outside. I never had a regular girlfriend.
65. My life before I met [REDACTED] was very chaotic. I spent time in borstal. I was sentenced to eighteen months and spent the first six months in Wormwood Scrubs before being transferred to the borstal.
66. When I was at St Neots, there was a chance for me to take some training but I never took advantage of it. There was a housemaster there and he was frustrated because I wouldn't accept the help being offered. He hit me too.

Records

67. I have never tried to get my records. It is only recently I told [REDACTED] about that part of my life.

Other information

68. There is a photograph on the Internet about Smyllum showing a group of children with toys. The kids there never had access to any toys. The clothes shown in the photograph are nothing like the clothes we were issued. I know it is around the time I was there as I recognised Francis McColl as one of the kids. It is a complete fabrication.
69. I remember Francis McColl at Smyllum. He was in my dormitory for a little while and then moved to another as he was a bit older. He was a little deaf and we got on well. Shortly after I got to know him, he died. I was told he was standing behind someone who was swinging a golf club and was hit accidentally in the head. While I was at Smyllum, I never saw any golf clubs.
70. As I grew older, I began feeling sorry for the nuns and the staff and forgave them for their abuse.

Hopes for the enquiry


71. I am angry about the denials and lies about life at Smyllum. I want to see things changed for the kids of tomorrow. There should be more intervention and vetting of staff looking after children.

- 72. From my life experiences with the probation service, I have observed changes which helped people. I hope the abuse doesn't happen today. They need to stop belittling people and help them reach their potential. I would like to see more monitoring of the staff.

- 73. If children are not seen by a parent or someone in that role in a twelve month period they should be allowed visits from independent visitors. The children would have the opportunity to be taken out of premises for a day and be open to allow them to build up trust and talk about any issues.

- 74. I want acknowledgement about my life, but do not want revenge. The changes needed can't be done on the cheap. They will cost and the money must be made available.

- 75. 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. 31-10-17