

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

EWF

Support person present: No

1. My full name is EWF. Up until the age of twelve I was known by the surname EWF. EWF was my birth surname. After the age of twelve I was known by the surname EWF. EWF was my adopted surname. When I turned sixteen I officially changed my surname to EWF but I may have unofficially gone by that name before then. I changed my name officially as soon as I could legally make that decision for myself. My date of birth is 1986. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going into care

2. I don't know who my dad is. My mother's name was when I was born. My mother was abused by her father when she was a child. Her father's surname was. Seemingly my grandmother didn't stop him. It was only stopped when either my auntie, my uncles or my grandmother stabbed him. My mother and my aunties all ended up either in foster care or group homes as a result of that. My mother had to receive therapy before my grandfather was ultimately taken to court and prosecuted. I believe he ended up going to jail.
3. A lot of what I have learned about my early life has either come from records I have recovered, stories I have heard from my mother or stories I have heard from my grandmother. I have been told by various members of my family that the only reason my mother got pregnant with me was because two of my aunties were also pregnant

at that time. I've been told that my mother felt left out and that was why she got pregnant with me.

4. I was born in Edinburgh. At that time my mother was either nineteen or twenty years old. My sister and brother were both born after me. [REDACTED] is about two years younger than me and [REDACTED] is about three years younger than me. We all have different fathers. My mother didn't marry any of the men who fathered myself or my siblings. I only know who my brother's father is.
5. After I was born my mother was put into a flat in Craigmillar in Edinburgh. My mother set that flat on fire in an effort to get my grandmother to take her back in. She was charged by the police for doing that and ultimately had to pay a fine. After the fire we moved in with my grandmother at her home in Gracemount in Edinburgh. By the time I was two months old my mother called social services and told social workers that she had hit me, tried to smother me and shaken me. I don't know whether she made that up or whether that might have actually happened. To begin with social services didn't do anything to help.
6. When the relationship between them broke down social services moved us to Richmondhill in Aberdeen. I was about four months old when we were both moved there. I can see from my records, around about the time that we were moved, that social workers felt that my mother was very immature, she handled me in a doll like manner the way a toddler would and didn't provide adequate supervision. There are comments that I am covered in bruises. Those sort of comments are recurring right throughout my records. I believe I was placed on the 'at risk register' around that time. That could have happened after I arrived in Aberdeen. I think I came off the 'at risk register' about six months after initially being placed on it.

#### **Richmondhill House, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire**

7. I was moved to Richmondhill House in approximately September 1986 with my mother. I stayed there with her for approximately a year until about September

1987. Richmondhill was a residential home for mothers and children. There were staff on duty 24/7. It was something like a mother and baby unit. I believe at that time there was only one mother and baby unit in Scotland and that was why we were relocated to Aberdeen.

8. I think the plan was initially that my mother would go to Richmondhill for a year to get some support before ultimately returning back to Edinburgh. I believe that the move to Richmondhill was so that my mother could be taught how to parent a child whilst getting support at the same time. However, from what I can see from my records, Richmondhill took a backseat when it came to actually doing that.
9. I don't have any memories surrounding Richmondhill and there is nothing within my records concerning what the basic day to day life was like there. However, there is plenty in my records surrounding my mother's behaviour and the way that she wasn't looking after me. I have read in my records that my mother wasn't sterilising or washing bottles properly for me, that she wasn't making feeds properly for me, that she appeared to be unaware of the importance of hygiene or routine, that she handled me roughly and that the staff felt that she behaved badly in order to get attention. The records say that my mother was manipulative and frequently told blatant lies and that she left me in a cot with my bottle propped up resulting in me and my bedding being soaked. There was one mention of my mother being out until 2:15 am without making sure I was looked after leaving me alone in a room aged one. There are notes of my mother saying to staff that she didn't know whether she could ever put me first and staff noting my mother's low tolerance levels.
10. There are further reports of my mother stealing money from other residents and just not really being an all-round decent person. They talk of my mother not listening to advice, not doing what she was being told to do and not following through on routines. At no point does it appear that those in charge are saying that things need to stop or I can't be left in my mother's care anymore. It looks from my records that my mother would just get given a talking to and then she would proceed to do whatever she had done wrong all over again.



11. There is some record of my mother improving but that all ends towards the time we were moved on. Around the time of us leaving there are notes in my records of my mother was saying that she had anxiety surrounding being left alone with me, didn't understand the consequences of her actions and was very dependent on the man of the moment.
  
12. At the end of our time at Richmondhill it is noted in my records that my mother had made the decision that she did not want to move back to Edinburgh and wanted to remain in Aberdeen. It would appear from my records that social workers attempted to get compulsory care for me but the reporter found that there were no grounds for that. Looking back at my time at Richmondhill, that was the start of decisions concerning my care not being made in the right way. I think that if someone had stepped in at that time then things may have been different for me later in life. That was the beginning of a childhood of failings by those who could have stopped it.

**Life after Richmondhill and before being placed into foster care more permanently**

13. My mother moved into a flat with me in Aberdeen in about August 1987. It's hard for me to remember where that was because over the subsequent five years she was in three or four different flats in Aberdeen. From what I can see in my records the moves were either because my mother wanted more space, the places she was placed in she saw as not being appropriate or because social services saw the places as inappropriate. There are also things surrounding the places not being decorated properly and my mother not having the funds to redecorate them. There's a lot about my mother wanting more and more money from social services as time went on. I believe she had some part time jobs but even with that she was at social work every other week wanting money. Around this time my mother is noted in my records as stating that she had negative feelings towards me. That tallies with my memories because she told me that she never really wanted me from a really early age.

14. I only have a few definite memories from the time I spent with my mother before being fostered permanently. Some things I remember and other things I have been told by family members. I have a memory of sitting eating my dinner in a kitchen on my own whilst everyone else is eating their dinner in the living room and seeing a chip pan going on fire. I have another memory of an incident where my sister fell off of a wardrobe and landed on a bedpost. We were locked in the room, like we were almost every night, and she just chose to climb up there. She ended up requiring surgery because of that. I think that happened towards the end of my time staying with my mother because my sister would have had to have been old enough, and mobile enough, to have done that.
  
15. I remember being dragged by mother to one of her friend's houses. I think I had had an accident of some sort then was pinned down to have a nappy placed on me. I also remember my mother shouting and screaming at me. I have been told by family members that there was an incident when my mother and her partner made me search for some cannabis they had lost. I was supposedly searching through the carpet for it.
  
16. I can see from my records that apparently at one point I may have had a fractured skull and had suffered accidental poisoning. My sister's name is scored out on a form and my name is noted in its place. I would have been two or three years old at that point. I think that is noted on a care intake form. I knew nothing about those things and can't find them noted anywhere else on my records. A fractured skull isn't an easy injury to cause and I would love to know what happened there. I want to know whether that injury corresponds to the records about the way my mother looked after me earlier on in my life.
  
17. I don't remember the full details of what happened but when I was thirteen or fourteen I made a report indirectly to a social worker called Isobel Williamson about one of my mother's boyfriends abusing me when I was two or three years old. He was my brother's dad. I don't fully remember what happened after I reported what happened but I do remember Isobel Williamson saying that they were keeping a



close eye on him because he still had contact with children. I think he had kids living with him at that time.

18. During the time I was with my mother I was placed on two occasions into foster care for a period of one or two days at some point in 1989. That was between the ages of three and four. I think they were both emergency placements when my mother was firstly prematurely in labour with [REDACTED] and secondly finally in labour with [REDACTED]. Neither of the placements lasted long and [REDACTED] was with me on both occasions. I think the foster carer I was initially placed with was a foster carer by the name of Sheila Davis. I think that the couple I was secondly placed with, [REDACTED] [EOI-EOJ] [REDACTED] [EOI-EOJ] were the same family I was placed with later on when I was just turning six years old.

#### **Leaving the care of my mother and ending up in more permanent foster care**

19. My siblings and I were placed back on the 'Non-accidental injury register' or 'NAI register' when we were born. I believe I came off it at some point but that was only for a period of six months. My sister, brother and I were under consideration to be placed on a supervision order. I think that ultimately happened with me but not my siblings. That didn't change for me until I was taken into care. My more permanent involvement with the care system started in [REDACTED] 1992. That all came about because my mother decided one weekend to phone my grandmother to ask her come and collect me in Aberdeen. At that time my mother was living at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in the Tillydrone area of Aberdeen. I've been told by my grandmother that my mother said during the phone call that if she didn't collect me then she would set fire to the flat with me in it. After phoning my grandmother my mother sat me outside the house on a doorstep with a black bin bag full of my possessions.
20. Sometime later my grandmother then arrived in Aberdeen with my uncles, picked me up and brought me back to Edinburgh. Looking back on my grandmother coming to Aberdeen to take me in, I don't know how much of it was caring and how much of it

was just saving face. By the subsequent Monday my mother and grandmother were both told by social workers that that arrangement should never have happened because I was under a supervision order at that time. My mother and grandmother were both then told that I needed to be brought back to Aberdeen to be placed in foster care to assess the relationship and try to facilitate me returning home.

**Foster care placement with [EOI-EOJ], [EOI-EOJ],  
Bridge of Don, Aberdeenshire**

21. The first more 'longer term' foster placement came in late [EOI-EOJ] 1992. I arrived there just before I turned six years old. The names of the foster carers were [EOI-EOJ] [EOI-EOJ]. I stayed with them for three weeks until [EOI-EOJ] 1992. I believe I was placed with them under an emergency foster care arrangement when I was three or four. Albeit I stayed longer, that was also the same arrangement when I arrived in [EOI-EOJ] 1992. I know that where they lived was a distance away from the Tillydrone area because there were issues with organising contact sessions with my mother and that was where she lived at that time. There are problems noted in my records surrounding my mother having to get various buses to see me.
  
22. I don't remember a massive amount about the three weeks I stayed with [EOI-EOJ] [EOI-EOJ]. I couldn't describe the house or what the sleeping arrangements were. I can remember a kitchen table, [EOI-EOJ] sitting there and there being lots of children in the house at the same time. There were probably as many as six or seven of us there at any one time. Some of those children may well have been [EOI-EOJ] children but I couldn't say that for certain. I don't remember any names of the other children but one of them could well have been called [EOI-EOJ].

**Abuse during time at** [EOI-EOJ]

[EOI-EOJ]

23. I remember nastiness and being called names constantly whilst I was there. It was always verbal abuse rather than anything else. I don't ever remember being hit. Whilst I was there I was told I was "fat", "stupid", "pathetic" and "worthless" by both [EOI-EOJ] I felt belittled and humiliated. [EOJ] was definitely worse. I remember her having a foul mouth on her. [EOI] wasn't as bad but he was still nasty. I can remember the day I left that foster care placement. I had a bag with me and [EOJ] said "thank fuck you are going, who would want you anyway?" That is the most vivid memory I have from my time there.

24. [EOJ] is now dead but I understand from the police that [EOI] is still alive. I have been told by the Crown that they are looking to prosecute him with something concerning children who have been in his care in the past. I understand from what the police have told me that the verbal abuse I suffered is a running theme in terms of what they are hearing from other people they have spoken with who were in [EOI-EOJ] care.

**Leaving the foster care placement with** [EOI-EOJ]

25. The reason I left the placement with [EOI-EOJ] was because it was an emergency placement. I can see from my records a note of me saying that I did not want to stay or be returned to [EOI-EOJ]. There is no further clarification surrounding that. I appear to have been told that I wouldn't be going back to them so I think I felt that was fine at the time.



**Foster care placement with EWJ and (first name unknown) Blackburn, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire**

26. The second more longer term placement began on 1992. The foster carers were a couple called EWJ and a man whose surname was I don't know his first name but I think it began with a . EWJ-SPO daughter was called . I know that because I can see that from records I have that haven't been properly redacted. I do know that EWJ-SPO house was a distance away from the Tillydrone area because there were again issues with organising contact sessions with my mother and that was where she lived at that time. I stayed with EWJ-SPO until either or 1992 when I was aged six years old. I think the placement was more permanent rather than an emergency one.
27. I don't remember a massive amount from my time with EWJ-SPO I have some small memories but the majority of what I know has come from my records. Most of the records I have recovered appear to have come from the period of time I was there. Looking back I think my basic needs were met. I think food was an issue on the side of EWJ-SPO It is constantly mentioned in my records that I would help myself to food to comfort eat. That was especially so after home visits.
28. I remember not being able to join in on the family activities when I was with EWJ-SPO My records say I was taken on a holiday with EWJ-SPO towards the end of my placement but I don't remember that happening and couldn't say where we went. It would have more than likely been in the UK because I didn't get a passport until adult life and I doubt my mother at that time would have allowed me to get one. It is noted in my records that we would be away so we would be uncontactable. Later on there is a note saying that my time away on the holiday had solidified my place within the family for me. Feeling part of the family isn't something I ever remember feeling during my time with EWJ-SPO
29. There is a lot of information surrounding how I supposedly stole out of EWJ s child's piggy bank but no description surrounding how this was supposedly

discovered or me being found with the money. It almost looks as if it has been assumed that because I was there I must have been the cause of it.

**Abuse during time at foster care placement with [redacted] and (first name unknown) [redacted]**

30. I found reading through the records from my time at [redacted] quite hard. [redacted] were sitting there with a six year old child and saying things like I needed firm boundaries because I would run riot, was over affectionate and had to be repeatedly told not to smother adults with affection. Looking back on those entries in my records, social services had taken a six year old child from a family where they were constantly told they were a problem then placing them with another one who were saying the exact same thing. [redacted] were saying those things about a child who was active, wanting to play with things and just doing what six year olds do. It was a situation where I was being blamed for everybody else's behaviour. That situation would be repeated constantly later on in my time in care.

[redacted]

31. I have a memory that might be from my time with [redacted] but it could well have been during my time with [redacted]. Logic would dictate that it was with [redacted] because it surrounds my birthday and I think that came after I was moved. I remember getting new clothes for my birthday that were too small. [redacted] said, if it was her, "oh you're too fat for those, they will need to go to [redacted] instead."
32. There is an entry amongst my records reporting that during a home visit to my mother I told her that [redacted] had smacked me. I remember being punished when I was at [redacted] and receiving a skelp on the backside so that ties in. There follows notes about [redacted] being asked about that. The records note her admitting that she had hit me and saying it was a slight tap like she did with her own children. There follows a note of her being told by a social worker that her behaviour wasn't appropriate when she wasn't the parent.



**Leaving foster care placement with [REDACTED] and (first name unknown) [REDACTED]**

33. Contact with my mother initially happened three times a week during my time with [REDACTED]. That went down to once a week after she declared that she wasn't having me back in Aberdeen and wanted me placed in Edinburgh instead. At that point social workers started contact with my grandmother. That was done to build up a relationship in preparation for me ultimately being moved down there. Towards the end of my time at [REDACTED] there was a hearing in front of a full fostering and adoption panel.
34. I can see that there are a lot of comments in my records around that time concerning my grandmother potentially facilitating an early return of me to my mother. There are a lot of comments surrounding that there might be a breakdown in communication which might lead to issues for me later on. There are also notes that show that social services were aware of the problems my mother had had growing up when staying with my grandmother and the issues between my mother and my grandmother that lead to us going up to Aberdeen. Even with that knowledge it was decided by the panel that I should be fostered by my grandmother.
35. I have been told that two of my aunts didn't take me in around that time because they had young children. Looking back at what happened next, both they and I wish that had happened because it may have prevented some of the things I experienced happening later on.

**Foster care placement / adoption by grandmother**

36. I was fostered then adopted by my grandmother between the ages of six and fourteen. That would be approximately between [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] 1992 and approximately [REDACTED] 2000. By this time my grandmother had remarried to a man known by the surname [REDACTED]. I was fostered for the majority of my time with my grandmother but that changed to a period of time when she had full parental custody and rights. I think that happened after about a year because I remember



social services backing off around about that time. I can also see from my records that is when Edinburgh Council took over from Aberdeen Council. The formal adoption order wasn't fully finalised until [REDACTED] 2000 and the registration wasn't concluded until [REDACTED] 2000. For the purposes of my statement, and any other evidence to the Inquiry, I do not wish to say anything further about my time with my grandmother in Edinburgh other than what I say below.

37. When I was ten years old I started taking overdoses. By the age of fourteen my grandmother told me to go and find my mother to stay with her. By this time my mother was living in Wester Hailes. I remember that my grandmother gave me my bus fare to get there. I had never been to Wester Hailes before. I didn't have a clue where I was going or who I should be looking for. I didn't end up finding my way to my mother's but instead found my way to a police station there. The police then took me back to my grandmother's. I don't know what conversation the police had with my grandmother but seemingly they were left with the impression that it was completely fine for me to have got on a bus at that age then got lost.
  
38. Within a couple of weeks I was staying with my mother again in Wester Hailes. Around about that time I transferred from the school I had previously been going to, Gracemount High, to Wester Hailes Education Centre. I ended up having to repeat third year when I should have moved into fourth year at school.
  
39. Within a couple of weeks to a month of staying with my mother I took an overdose. That resulted in me being taken to The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. It was my mother who instigated me going back into care whilst I was in The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. She told social services that she wouldn't take me back. She basically told them after the overdose that she wasn't willing to have me. By that point the rest of my family weren't willing to have me either. I was ultimately picked up from The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh with two black bin bags of stuff and dropped off at Greendykes. It would have been two social workers who took me.

**Greendykes Young People's Centre, 10 Greendykes Road, Edinburgh**

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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107. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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### **Life after leaving care**

111. At first I was placed in various bed and breakfasts. I was basically dumped in rooms where the only cooking facility was a kettle. I was constantly moved and stayed in places in Marchmount, Leith and Newington. I'd only get a week at a time then have to go to The Access Point or the council on Waterloo Place to have that arranged. I was initially provided with £30 a week to live off by social services. Each week I would have to report to a social worker initially at Captain's Road Social Work Office then later on the through care and after care team, who had just been set up and were located near Haymarket, in order to receive my £30 each week. I had to do that until I had benefits set up for me. The benefits were probably around about double what social services were providing. Sometime later I then ended up on disability living allowance.
112. During my time in and around homeless accommodation I reported someone to the police. The individual concerned was in connection with the period of time I was adopted by my grandmother and do not wish to discuss further with the Inquiry. One of the staff from Greendykes had to come with me as a responsible adult. I can't remember which staff member that was. I had to provide a statement and attend an examination. After that the staff member just walked away. All this stuff had happened and they just walked away. There was no support or thought given to how I would be feeling afterwards.

113. I couldn't say how long I was in and out of bed and breakfast accommodation, however, by the time I was sixteen or seventeen I was placed in a flat in Gorgie. That only came about through speaking to a social worker with the newly created through care and after care team located on Haymarket. During my time in that flat I had support workers who would come in one after another to essentially babysit me. That was done in an attempt to avoid me overdosing and ending up back in hospital. The support workers came from The Rock Trust, Barnados Sixteen Plus and Edinburgh council. A schedule was made for who would come at what time so that I wouldn't ever be left alone for any great length of time.
114. I eventually lost the flat after an overdose and ended up in The Royal Edinburgh. From there I was placed back into homeless accommodation. After a period of more bed and breakfast accommodation I ended up in a flat on [REDACTED] in Fountainbridge. Whilst there I ended up in a relationship with a guy who wasn't the best person to be in a relationship with and I took another overdose. That was one in amongst over two hundred I took before the age of about twenty one.
115. I ended up in a hostel in Pilton. During my time there I ended up on heroin because some of the other residents there convinced me to do so. I was then in another hostel in Oxfords. That didn't last long because I took another overdose. Looking back on that whole period of time after leaving Greendykes the whole routine was pretty much hostel, bed and breakfast, overdose then hospital. My time was pretty much spent doing that on repeat. There were flats but they all ended in a mess.
116. In 2006 I went to St John's Hill Supported Accommodation near Holyrood. St John's Hill comprised of flats which you shared with one other person. There were staff there who taught you things like how to budget. They tried to help me with my self-harming but struggled with that. There were ups and downs there. I used heroin again there. It was nice to feel numb for a while. There was an incident when a fellow resident went for me [REDACTED]. Fortunately, staff came up and pinned her down before getting police to take her away. I wasn't the best person to live with because I barely knew how to function. I wasn't a bad person and I didn't set out to cause problems.



117. I met my eldest child's father in The Royal Edinburgh during a period staying at St John's Hill. By that time I would have been twenty. Things only really started to calm down when I was twenty in 2006 and became pregnant with my eldest. The minute I became pregnant in [REDACTED] 2006 I stopped all of my self-harming and overdosing. Sadly, the man I met committed suicide just before [REDACTED] in 2006.
118. The staff at St John's Hill were really supportive when I discovered I was pregnant. I remember staff members walking around [REDACTED] with me every day to help me decide what were the best things to do. At that point I was anxious about having to deal with social services and wasn't sure whether they would let me keep the baby. I then came back into contact with the social worker who had been assigned to me when I was in Greendykes, Pat Brown. I had been referred to social services because I had mental health issues and had been self-harming for a long time but had stopped by the time she became involved and I was pregnant with my eldest child.
119. Pat Brown should never have been allocated to me. I attempted to report to her major safety concerns surrounding my unborn, then born, niece staying with my mother after she was allocated again to me. There were six adults in the house and I wasn't comfortable with my niece being there due to how my mother was known to be. Sadly my concerns were ignored and my niece ended up needing to require surgery to repair a rip between her back and front passage because of things that occurred whilst she was in my mother's house. Not one of the other five adults in the house could prevent the perpetrator getting to my niece.
120. During the process leading up to my eldest's birth, Pat Brown brought up all the things I had gone through as a child as reasons for why I shouldn't keep him. I remember sitting in a meeting with doctors, social workers and health visitors. She was the only one in those meetings who didn't recognise that I had made progress, had made a change, achieved support, was putting in effort and had secured a flat. Pat Brown was ultimately taken off my case. Fortunately, my replacement social worker decided six weeks before my son was born that there was no reason why I

shouldn't keep my child. I remember that after my eldest was born I bumped into Pat Brown. She said to me that she always knew that I would do well which felt like a slap in the face when I heard her say that. She had previously said that I was an attention seeker and had attempted to take my eldest son off of me before he was born.

121. My eldest child was born in [REDACTED] 2007. By that time social services organised for me to have what I regard as my first proper flat on [REDACTED] in Newington. I think of it as my first proper flat because it was the first place where I was functioning properly. It was the first place in my whole life where I had ever felt settled. I managed to get support from Horizons who provide help both for people who have mental health issues but also have been through the care system. They supported me for about five years. I was ultimately in that flat for about seven and a half years in total.
122. During my time in the flat on [REDACTED] I continued to have lots of issues with my mental health. However, at the same time I learnt how to function as an adult. I did have slip ups. I ended up in the Royal Edinburgh when my eldest was six months old and then again when he was three or four. The time when he was three or four was when a friend of a friend became jealous and made false accusations to social services about the way I was looking after my eldest. That left me suicidal. I made sure my eldest was looked after, I took an overdose and ended up in The Royal Edinburgh. Since the last occasion when I overdosed when my eldest was three or four I have never taken an overdose or self-harmed again. I have been in my current house for the last seven or eight years. My second child was born in 2012.
123. I haven't really been able to work in adult life. I have had three small jobs. I worked with an uncle's ex-girlfriend. Sadly my uncle put a stop to that. I worked in a newsagents near Haymarket. That stopped because the people who ran it couldn't deal with my self-harming. I worked in BHS in Cameron Toll which came to end because I needed an operation in hospital concerning injuries to my arm that had happened when I was younger. They needed to remove metal plates that had



previously been put into my arm. After that operation I just didn't go back to my job. Finally, I had a job on the bakery counter in Savacentre in Cameron Toll. I just became too unwell to continue working there.

### **Impact**

124. I have been impacted in my childhood both by my experiences in care and through the things that I experienced during my time fostered then adopted by my grandmother. The decisions that were made on both sides of my childhood changed my life. Had the right decisions been made for me, and about me, then my life could have been changed for the better. I have, and still feel, massively let down and failed by the systems that should have protected me.
125. All I knew in life growing up was being hurt, rejected and let down. That didn't really stop until I had children of my own. I have been left with a lifetime of mental health issues. I have complex PTSD and borderline personality disorder. Both conditions have been achieved through a life of childhood trauma. I have a long list of physical health issues connected to my childhood. I have been told that that can be attributed back to my adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs.
126. I have poor self-image and I blame myself for a lot of the things that have happened. I don't trust people very easily and have difficulty forming relationships. I just don't do well with people. I don't have many people around me. What relationships I do have result in either the person leaving or me pushing them away. I am thirty five and I don't have any intention to be in a relationship with a man.
127. I lost contact with my wider family when I was placed in Greendykes and didn't get back in contact until I was eighteen. I haven't spoken to my mother since my eldest child was two years old so that is approximately twelve years. She came to visit me six weeks after he was born. During that visit she told me that she had never loved me the way that she had loved my brother and sister. She told me that when meeting her first grandchild for the first time. I don't have any intention to have a

relationship with any of my family. If those in my family were dead right now then providing a full statement to the Inquiry wouldn't even be half the issue it is.

128. My time in care, and the things that happened, has affected my education. As a child I was told that I was intelligent enough to become a lawyer. I was pushed to understand that I could have one of those type of high paying jobs and would have no issues achieving that. I sat my Standard Grades in The Royal Edinburgh. I sat five Standard Grades out of the nine I should have sat and achieved a 1, three 2s and a 3. My education never went much further than that. I haven't been able to pursue any further education as I would have done otherwise. I have done small units of qualifications through The Royal Edinburgh but nothing further. I have done a unit in caring for people with dementia, a unit concerning childcare and other things too.
129. Growing up I wanted to be a nurse, however, I haven't been able to really work during my adulthood. Most of my life I have been on benefits struggling to function day to day. I have learnt how to function to the best of my ability but it isn't the same as other people can function. Looking after and protecting my family is the most important job I have in the world. I spend a lot of time these days fighting for myself and my kids. I do have to still do that. I don't know what is ever going to be achievable in terms of education and work because my mental health can be good but it doesn't last very long.
130. My mental health has at times affected my ability to parent. My eldest has needed to go into foster care on two occasions because I ended up in the Royal Edinburgh during periods when I was unable to cope. I can't cope with the thought that he would have ended up in care more longer term if I had succeeded in either attempts to end my life. That scares me. I knew the situation with the care system before I made those attempts but I just felt so alone and that there were no other options.



## **Treatment and support**

131. I have undertaken counselling over the years. When I was pregnant with my eldest I went for something that is called dialectical behaviour therapy, or DBT. Looking back, the therapy has never made much of a difference. The counsellors tried to claim that they were the reason why I got better around that time. It was quite nice to turn around to them and say that it wasn't because of them. The only reason I got better was because I had found a reason to live. That was through having my eldest. Knowing I was responsible for a child and not wanting that child go through what I experienced did make a difference. I would never want him to go through what I went through. The only way I can prevent that is to be here.
132. I still undertake counselling and have been attending sessions a little over a year. It all feels a bit awkward because it has to be done over the phone. That is because of covid. It all feels a bit weird when I do it and I don't feel as if I can say everything because of that. Meeting people in person is different because you can read their body language and so on. Sometimes, even when I am comfortable, I am still cautious because I don't want to affect the person who is listening.

## **Involvement with raising awareness about mental health and self-harm**

133. The first time I overdosed was when I was ten years old. I went on to make over two hundred attempts at my life subsequently. Nobody showed me how to do that. I didn't discover from somewhere else how to do that. That is the same when it came to self-harm. That was discovered completely by accident.
134. I have done a lot in my adult life to campaign to overcome the stigmas and misinformation surrounding self-harm in particular. A lot of what is out there has come from academics rather than from people, like myself, who have experienced it. I think my motivation for becoming involved was to try and help other people. By the time I started to become involved I was pregnant with my eldest and that had made

such a change in my life. I think it was because of that I then wanted to help other people.

135. My first involvement with raising awareness came during a time I was in The Royal Edinburgh a few years ago. During an art therapy class I designed some posters about self-harm. A woman from Penumbra became involved and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Sadly, I can't find a copy of the posters now. After then I became involved with an organisation that was connected to See Me. It was a media organisation that arranged for people such as myself to take part in loads of different interviews. That would have been in either 2006 or 2007. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I then became involved with assisting a woman from the educational side of Penumbra training people on the topic of self-harm. That involved attending sessions with staff and helping teach them how to talk with people who self-harmed or how to help them cope.

136. I have been to conferences about ACEs. I attended a talk by Nicola Sturgeon where she talked about how she was going to fund early intervention for children with mental health issues. I got to ask a question after she spoke. I asked her how she thought the government was going to fund early intervention when they couldn't even properly fund things for children who had already received a diagnosis. She said that it would be coming from a separate pot of funding which I felt missed the point. I was trying to highlight the lack of funding at that time more broadly for children with mental health issues. I knew that because of experiences I had attempting to get funding for my son.

### **Reporting of abuse after leaving care**

#### *To social services*

137. I don't remember the full details of what happened but when I was thirteen or fourteen I made a report to a social worker about one of my mother's boyfriends



abusing me when I was two or three years old. He was my brother's dad. I don't fully remember what happened after I reported what happened but I do remember the social worker saying that they were keeping a close eye on him because he still had contact with children. I think he had kids living with him at that time.

*To the police*

138. I have been asked to provide a statement about what happened during my time in foster care on two occasions to the police. The first time there was police involvement was in either 2016 or 2017. I know that because it was shortly after I had moved into a new house in Niddrie. Two police officers initially visited my grandmother's house before she sent them to my house. The police wanted to speak to me about my first emergency placement with Sheila Davis when my mother went into premature labour with [REDACTED]. It was definitely a placement where I had only been with the foster parents for a day or two. They wanted to know about what I remembered about Sheila Davis and her relationship with her daughter. Seemingly Sheila Davis's daughter had made a complaint against her mother.
139. The police officers were from Aberdeen and had travelled all the way down to speak to me. I didn't know what to say to them at that time. I didn't have much to tell them because I didn't know anything. All we could work out was that I would have been on the placement they were referring to when I was two or three years old. I don't think they took a statement. I think the conversation was more surrounding that I was so young that I had no memories.
140. I ended up giving the police officers the Aberdeen care records I had from my time in care. I handed over my records more because of my concerns surrounding my niece at that time. I wanted to show the police what my mother was like when she was looking after children. I wanted to show to them that they should be concerned about my niece's safety. Although sadly things happened to my niece I did ultimately manage to make sure that my niece, and also my nephew, never went back to my mother's house. I haven't a clue what happened after I spoke to the police on that occasion concerning the foster carers they wanted to speak to me about.

141. Then next time I spoke to the police was in January 2021. Some people had reported [EOI-EOJ] as being abusive whilst in their care and they were in the process of contacting all the people who had been fostered by them to obtain further evidence. That led to the police wanting to speak to me. The police phoned me out of the blue on 2<sup>1st</sup> January 2021. The police making the enquiries were from Aberdeen. They wanted to take a statement over the phone from me there and then but I wasn't able to do that because I had my kids around. I remember that I had to call a friend after the call because it all came so sudden and I needed some support. It felt a bit much because at that time I had only just started the process of obtaining my records again. I was phoned back by the police on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021. That's when I provided a statement to a male police officer over the phone. After providing my statement the police officer informed me that [EOJ] [EOJ] had recently died and that it was [EOI] they were looking into.
142. The next time I heard from the police was a week before Christmas in 2021. I received a letter asking me for my availability between March 2022 and May 2023 because they may be pursuing a prosecution against [EOI]. Apparently the trial, if it goes ahead, is going to be held in Glasgow. The next thing I received was text on Christmas Day 2021 asking me to make sure that I sent them back the paperwork they had sent asking me to detail when I would be available. I think that text came only three days after receiving the letter. When I tried to phone the police to tell them that I felt that texting me on Christmas Day was totally inappropriate all I could get through to was a recorded message saying I could leave a voicemail.
143. The police's procedure surrounding contacting persons who have been abused in care needs to change. Receiving the letter I received the week before Christmas, and the text I received on Christmas Day, concerning their attempt to prosecute [EOI] was totally inappropriate. The way they handled their communication with me was all too much in amongst the other things that were going on in my life at that time.



### *To the Inquiry*

144. The only other time I have reported my care history and the abuse I experienced is with the Inquiry. I have been the most candid I have ever been with anyone when providing this statement. I think that partly is because those interviewing me are relative strangers.

### **Records**

145. I am attempting to recover my records to help the process of filling in so many of the blanks that I have when it comes to my childhood. There are so many things that I just don't know. I want to see what answers I can get and know more about me. I need to try and understand why I am the way I am. I want to know why I parent the way I parent. Another part of why I am recovering all of my records is in anticipation of applying to the redress scheme. I am trying to get all of my ducks in a row before I go down that route.
146. I initially obtained my records from Aberdeen Council when I was twenty one in 2007. I think they were only half of my records. I thought I had lost that set of records so I applied for another copy. When I re-applied for my records Aberdeen Council were completely on the ball. I had my redacted records within a month and had no problems obtaining them. Apparently Aberdeen Council have digitalised a lot of their records so that is why they could provide them so quickly. The only issue I have with the records that were provided is that there are parts missing and the redaction isn't great. Parts of them are redacted so poorly I am able to work out what is being said. Fortunately, I found the copy I obtained in 2007 and am in the process of comparing and contrasting them with the copy I more recently obtained to find out what is missing.
147. Birthlink are in the process of helping me obtain the records I haven't already recovered. I started that process in the middle of 2020. I am currently on a waiting list for my Edinburgh council social work records. As yet they haven't confirmed

whether they have them or not. I have been in a queue for a year and they haven't got round to recovering mine yet. I have been told that it will be six to nine months further before they will become available if at all.

148. My Edinburgh council records should have been done by now. Edinburgh council have blamed covid for it taking so long. I have been told that none of the records are digitalised, are still all on paper and they need to get into storage to recover them. I've also been told that it will take some time to undertake the redaction of what they recover.
149. I am trying to recover my health records from my GP. I want to recover the childhood portion of my records. That's supposed to take a month but four months later on I am still waiting to obtain a copy. They too are blaming covid. I haven't had any communication from my GP about what they are doing to provide a copy. I have also applied to NHS Lothian for all of my psychiatric health records and to the police for a copy of the statement I provided them in 2021.
150. There are things that I would love to get access to but I can't. Things like the daily records that Greendykes held. I remember seeing those when I was there and know that the staff had to sit down and write those up every day. I know I won't be able to access them because they are not stored with my social work records. Seeing those records would help fill in a lot of the blanks from my childhood.

### **Lessons to be Learned**

151. The experience of being placed into care is horrendous. You are taken from the only place you know and put into a place where you know nobody and are looked after by strangers. When I look back on my experiences in care the big thing I think that can be learned is how not to look after a child in care. There were so many points in my childhood where someone could have stepped in and so many points when they didn't. The things that happened were allowed to happen because of all of the failures along the way.



*The decision making process for children in care*

152. People were allowed to make decisions about things that were going to happen to me without taking me into consideration. There are things in my records where people are noting that they didn't think it was appropriate to discuss certain things in order not to damage my coping abilities at that particular time. There are notes surrounding things considering what would happen if things didn't go the way they were meant to go. There are reports that describe me as a bright bubbly energetic six year old. When I read my records I can't help but think how those who were supposed to care for me took that and turned me into what I am now. Why did other people get to decide that?
153. Social workers have a lot to answer for. They were the ones who made choices throughout my childhood. Their decisions regarding my care have left me with a lifetime of mental health issues that I will never get over. They were the ones who placed me in the places I was. None of them have had to answer for their decisions. They were the ones who left me with my mother who had a history of suffering abuse herself then placed me with my grandmother who had a history of not stopping abuse happening within the family. They left me with my family when they shouldn't have even though they knew there was a risk of abuse happening and put me in care in inappropriate places.
154. I wish that when my mother made that phone call to social services when I was two months old in 1986 and told social workers what she had done that a social worker had stepped in then. I wish I had then been taken away and put up for adoption outwith my family. The first thing they should have been doing is just taking me away from my mother. Things shouldn't have been allowed to have gone any further. Instead there followed years of reports about how my mother showed little attachment to me, didn't show appropriate love or care and didn't properly supervise me. She was just allowed to continue. Someone should have stepped in then but they didn't.

155. For me poor decision making is not just the carers, foster carers or social workers involved. It also concerns the various panels who made decisions surrounding my care. The adoption and fostering panel I was involved with knew all about the issues between my mother and my grandmother but decided to place me with my grandmother. I wish someone had stepped in there but they didn't.
156. I just don't know how the people on these panels and the social workers involved with me made the wrong decisions and screwed it up so many times. If it hadn't been for the decisions that were made early on then I might not be where I am now. I might have been better or I might have been worse. At the end of the day, either way, nobody gave me a chance. Nobody protected me, looked out for me or tried to make things better.

*Responding to children at risk / GIRFEC*

157. The authorities involved in my care chose to stick with the status quo. How many times does a mother have to say that they don't want a child until you take that child away and put them with somebody who does care? There must have been someone in the world who couldn't have children who would have happily adopted a child. I appreciate that it isn't appropriate in all situations but I still think there needs to be less focus on trying to keep the family together when a child is at risk.
158. When a child is at risk don't leave them because you will never know what goes on behind closed doors. Proof of abuse doesn't need to be a mark or a bruise. If you have a parent who speaks to authorities and says that they have shaken or smothered a baby then that baby should be taken away instantly. If that parent can do that to a defenceless baby then what on earth are they going to do to that child when they grow up. That shouldn't be allowed. Children shouldn't be given to families who have a history of showing that they can't be trusted around caring for children. If that family can't keep their own children safe then why on earth hand another child to them?



159. I am less than positive about GIRFEC and SHANARRI. To me GIRFEC is just something that allows the net to be stretched further than it should be. You can't keep stretching the net further and further until it rips. My experience of being a child and adult involved with social workers is that those children who are at highest risk are known to social services. I have repeatedly seen social workers failing children who are at risk. GIRFEC is used to dump all those children in that net in the hope that those children at risk are caught. The solution isn't GIRFEC. The solution is that as soon as a child is known to be at risk then social services need to deal with it. Children shouldn't be left with abusive carers and families in the hope things will get better or because there is a lack of foster carers. That just leads to situations where children are abused or end up dead. But having mental health issues and showing a willingness and ability to change is not a risk factor.

*Awareness of ACEs in society*

160. The correlation between ACEs and later on health issues does speak volumes to me. I think the issue surrounding ACEs is more that there is a problem with getting people to implement awareness into their skills when talking to people. My doctors, for example, know I score very highly on the ACEs chart. However, even with that every time I go in to get my B12 injection the nurses there still persist with arguing with me. They just don't appreciate how to speak to someone who charts as highly as I do on the ACEs chart. I don't think I've attended a single appointment where I haven't ended up in an argument or in tears because of the nurse. I have had to search out my letter diagnosing me with complex PTSD so that I can show that to my doctor to get the nurse to back off me. I shouldn't have to do that.

*Reporting abuse*

161. I was basically told that everything I knew to be true was a lie when I tried to report things. In my experience children are never believed. I had the belief as a child that I would never be believed because I never had been. I'd tried to report things to various people in the past and I hadn't been believed. Nothing ended up being done. There needs to be more balance when it comes to listening to children in

care. It shouldn't be that children aren't believed because it is assumed that they lie. If there is someone available to report things to and a child makes a report then that needs to be taken seriously. Any report needs to be investigated fully.

162. There were so many opportunities for people of all sorts to step in and report things on my behalf during my childhood. There has to be a whistleblowing system in place that doesn't cause issues for those who want to whistleblow. People shouldn't feel scared to report things when they see them. I was once reported as a parent for shouting at my eldest when I was in the street. When I look back on that I think good on the person who did that. The person who saw me shouting didn't see that a minute earlier my eldest had run into the street and almost been run over a bus. Yes I did scream and shout at him but I would much prefer he learnt a lesson from that than be flattened by a bus. That person wouldn't have known that and they wouldn't have known whether he would be safe going back to the home where he lived. That report put me through hell but I much prefer that than another situation like my niece or myself. People, like that woman, should feel free to come forward whatever the consequences.

*Staff accountability and vetting*

163. All staff involved in the care of children need to be accountable. There needs to be a whole vetting process for those who want to become a social worker, carer or foster carer. They need to be vetted to the highest level. If there is the slightest hint of impropriety then that individual needs to be removed. Get rid of them. They are not needed if they are like that. If a foster carer has children who they have failed that are their own biological children or adopted then they shouldn't be given someone else's.
164. Staff shouldn't be held accountable years after their actions but there and then. The staff and the homes should be inspected very regularly. Those inspections should be unannounced so that they can't have the place ready with all the children told that they had to be on their best behaviour. Inspectors need to go in and see the chaos of these places because, in my experience of these places, they are going to be



chaotic 90% of the time. If need be send in people undercover as members of staff to see what it is actually like in the place.

*Labelling children in care*

165. There needs to be a system where the kids are actually coming first. The child shouldn't be seen to be an issue. It is not the child's fault that they are in care. Yes some of them may have behavioural issues but that doesn't mean that it is their fault. Children who have these issues can't control the way that they respond to situations. They are not problem children. There are probably a lot more issues going on that aren't being explained that explain why they act the way they do. Most of the time the reason that children end up in care is not because of the child but issues with the family around the child.
166. I was labelled an attention seeker because I took overdoses. Nobody looked at the reasons behind why I did that and that is what needs to be looked at. There just should not be judgemental staff in place who believe that the child is in care because of their own issues. There should be a full investigation into what has gone on when the child is placed into care. There should be a full report handed over to the staff who are looking after the child saying why the child has come over to them. The report should set out what the child has experienced, why they have additional needs and why they can't cope with the world. The staff knew some of what happened to me when I arrived and should have helped me with that. Instead, they made things much worse.

*The need for teaching children life skills*

167. I was put into all these places after leaving Greendykes without actually having the skills to function as an adult. I just didn't know how to function as an adult. Nobody had ever taken the time to teach me what life would be like outside of the care system before I left it. There was no conversation or help provided before leaving care. One day I was in a care home and the next day after hospital I was in a bed

and breakfast. I don't even think social services helped me apply for my benefits. I think it was someone at The Access Point who helped me with that.

168. I had no preparation for adulthood when I left care. I know now that I have to be the one as a parent who needs to teach my sons how to cook a meal, run a washing machine or pay a bill. I never had that so I never learnt any of those things. There was no parent to teach me those skills. Nobody ever explained to me things like rent or council tax. I didn't know anything about all of that. I remember that when I received my first wage the age of sixteen I went and blew it all on cakes because I was so excited. I didn't have much by way of outgoings but that is what I still did. Teaching children life skills needs to be done across the board with any organisation or institution that interacts with children. It wasn't just Greendykes who didn't prepare me it was also all the schools I went to. No school that I went to provided me with life skills. Somebody needs to take that on for children in care at a young age.

*Replacing group homes with foster care*

169. I think that society needs to get rid of group homes. They serve no purpose these days other than to label the child. There are enough people in this world, or should be enough people in this world, who are willing to become foster parents. Every child should be with a foster family so that that child feels part of a family. I know foster carers who are amazing people and carers. A lot of them go on to adopt the children that they foster. They're the kind of people who need to be looking after children not staff in group homes or foster parents who take in large volumes of children in under emergency placements. I appreciate that not every foster family will be good but that should be managed by a vetting process. That system would be better than having a group home system because there needs to be more staff involved in the care of the child and therefore more possibility for abuse. I also think that where there is an increased number of people involved there is less accountability.



### *Reporting without fear of police referrals*

170. Due to the decisions made by social workers and the fostering and adoption panel I was put into a situation that I should never have been placed in. The people involved in those decisions knew about my family background when those decisions were made. I went on to suffer experiences that are worse than those I have disclosed in other parts of this statement. Sadly, I cannot talk about them here due to the risk that it would place myself and my children at present. I have been left in a situation where I no longer can talk about what happened during the nine years I wasn't in the official care system for fear of repercussions.
171. I wish there was a safe middle way in which I could talk openly about what happened without fear of those disclosures being passed on for risk purposes to the police. There should be a space, whether that be the Inquiry or other organisations, where I can safely make those disclosures and talk about the whole of my life history. There are things that happened that I have never talked about out loud because of my fear of repercussions. The only thing that comes close to that space is my counselling however even then I am still nervous.

### **Hopes for the Inquiry**

172. I know that some of the stuff I have spoken about in this statement is minor in comparison to other people. However, even with what I experienced I still think society needs to change. My experience of care was that people thought that it was the child's fault that they were in care. That needs to be changed.
173. I grew up being told by everybody, whether they be family, the police, the staff in the care homes or teachers, that I shouldn't be believed and that I needed to stop lying. I want people to now believe and listen to me. I want people to answer for what they did. My hope is the whole system changes. Everything needs to be looked at from top to bottom. It would be good if one of the recommendations from this Inquiry was to get rid of GIRFEC and SHANARRI. They don't get it right for any child never mind

every child. Most of all though I want this Inquiry to change things so that children in care can feel safe. I want children to be children. I want children to have a childhood and then have a life afterwards.

174. 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..... 28.02.2022 .....