

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Sheila DAVIES

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is Sheila June Davies. My maiden name was Mowat. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1959. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Experiences as a foster carer

Background

2. I have a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ), Level 3 in Childcare and Education that I obtained through The Children's House, which was a training school in Aberdeen. I also have a SVQ Level 4 in Management, which I obtained through the Grampian Chamber of Commerce. I can't remember exactly when I obtained those qualifications, other than it was in the early nineties.
3. I trained and worked as a hairdresser for five years after I left school, before I emigrated to Australia with the man that I married in 1980. In Australia I worked with an airline company for four-and-a-half years and then I moved back to Aberdeen in 1985. I then did odd jobs cleaning and working in hotels tending bars and waitressing. By that time I was pregnant with my son and, when he was about eight months old, my marriage broke down.
4. When my son was born I decided I wanted to work from home so I applied and became a registered child minder and foster carer when he was about three. That would be in

1988 or 1989. I was a child minder and foster carer until 2004, when I opened a business in Aberdeen. It closed a few years later and since then I have worked in a supermarket.

Becoming a foster carer

5. I don't remember who I first contacted to become a child minder, but after I applied and while I was being assessed, fostering came up in conversation with a social worker from the under-eights section in Aberdeen. I decided that I wanted to become a foster carer as well, so the social work ran both registrations together. I was approved to become both a child minder and foster carer in, I think, June 1989.
6. I suppose I decided I wanted to foster children because I wanted to help kids and because I wanted to work at home. There had been a time when I had to go into hospital and I didn't think I would have anybody to look after my son and I knew that I could help other children who might have been put in similar situations.
7. I had a series of interviews and meetings with a social worker from the under-eights section and those meetings were all in my home. I can't remember the woman's name, but it was just she who came to see me, nobody else did. I assume the purpose of those interviews and meetings was to gauge my attitude towards children and to establish what I would be offering them. I was also asked about my background, but it's so long ago I don't remember what else was asked.
8. I was living in Dyce at that time, in a two-bedroom, ground floor flat which had an enclosed garden. My mother also stayed with my son and I. It was agreed with the social worker that I would move into the living room and any foster child would share a room with my son. At the time, I wanted to foster babies who were the same age as my son so that made sense.
9. As a child minder I could run my business however I felt was best, I wasn't given much advice. I could take as many children as was allowed, which was twelve at that time including my own, or I could just take one.

10. I didn't need any particular qualifications to become either a child minder or a foster carer, but I don't know what checks or assessments were carried out on me. I don't know what references were obtained either.
11. I think I was actually rushed through the application process because they had a baby who was ready to come into foster care and they didn't have a placement. I think the social worker had told me that and I think the whole application process took weeks, rather than months.
12. Once I had been approved and had started fostering, I had regular meetings with my link worker and with social workers. Those meetings were generally within my house. I can't remember how often there were meetings, but they were regular.
13. I don't know if the meetings were so that ongoing checks and assessments could be carried out, but they continued throughout the time I was fostering and in each of the other two houses I later moved into. I'm sure the other properties would have been assessed as my first flat was, but I can't remember if that happened before I moved into them, or after I had actually moved. My mum had also been assessed as part of the fostering application process so that, although she worked during the day, she could look after the children in the evening if I was away.
14. I think that at the time the process for becoming a foster carer was okay, although I know there is a lot more involved now. I think there would need to be a lot more preparation with older children especially. Older children are a lot more challenging because I think they come with a lot more problems from their background. Some have a lot more issues than younger children.

Training

15. After I was approved to become both a child minder and a foster carer, I became a member of the Child Minding Association and the Foster Care Association. I was very keen to do as much training as possible and I did quite a lot through both organisations.

I think I attended about as many courses as were offered, although I can't say which of the two associations the various courses were through.

16. The training that I undertook through both those associations was ongoing over the years I fostered and it was voluntary. It wasn't something I had to do, it was something I felt I wanted to do to keep myself current. Getting the support from the other people in the associations and keeping my knowledge up to date was important to me and it was useful.
17. My membership of those associations was voluntary and I joined because I was a single parent. I wanted to be able to bounce things off other people who were also child minding or fostering and who had their own experiences. I wanted to be able to discuss things with other adults who were in a similar situation.
18. I think the meetings were on a monthly basis and there were various speakers and trainers present. If I remember correctly a speaker from the social work department came to one of those meetings.
19. I don't think there was any training that I had to do either before I became a foster carer or that was ongoing. The fostering association did also offer seminars and I attended as many as I could.
20. I attended training on looking after children with different experiences, such as having been neglected, physically or sexually abused, bereaved, or who had a disability, or who needed additional support or had educational needs, but I don't know if that was through the fostering association, or the child-minding association. That was something I did myself though, it wasn't provided as part of the fostering process.
21. There was also training given in child protection through the associations, but I can't remember specifically what it involved. I have completed child protection training periodically as it changed over the years. I have been on countless difference courses because I was going on multiple courses every year.

22. I don't think I have received any training on disciplining children or managing their behaviour, although I'm not certain. Again I can't remember if there was any training provided about what differences there might be between fostering arrangements, such as between emergency, short term, long term or respite care.
23. I can't remember whether there was any written or verbal guidance or instructions given to me by the social work department about my role and responsibilities as a foster carer.
24. I think it would be beneficial for people to meet with other foster carers, especially experienced ones to get an insight into how they find it. I know that the culture has now totally changed and I believe that does now happen.
25. I think the training I received through the associations was okay for the time, but the lack of training from the social work department and the lack of information provided wouldn't be acceptable now. I think that all the training I did voluntarily should probably have been something that a foster carer had to do. I think the more training you can get the better.

Foster carer arrangements

26. I don't think I had any understanding of the legal basis of my relationship as a foster carer with the local authority. I didn't see fostering as an employment, because I wasn't actually getting paid to do it. I was offering a service, but I hadn't thought whether I was employed, or self-employed, or whether I worked for someone else or for myself. I was a pretty down-to-earth, motherly sort of person and fostering and child-minding were what I wanted to do. I viewed foster care as my vocation.
27. At the time I applied to become a foster carer, my idea had been that I would look after children who were much the same age as my own child, but I ended up doing emergency foster care and I had children of all ages. I don't know how it came to be that I started doing the emergency care.

28. I had a link worker through the fostering team of the social work department and I also had an inspection officer through the child minding section. I don't remember all of their names, but there were several over the years. I asked for one to be changed at one point, because I didn't have any connection with her. I think you have to have a good working relationship, especially doing the emergency care, but I just didn't with this one and I actually dreaded her visits. I don't know why that was, whether it was just a clash of personalities, but eventually I asked for somebody else.
29. There were visits from the various social workers for the children, although sometimes I just had children for two or three days and that didn't happen. I was still quite a young woman at that time, but I don't think there was any additional support provided despite that. I did think the support was adequate at the time though.
30. I don't think it's necessary for foster carers to have child care qualifications. You can have a great relationship with kids and be wonderful with them and not have any qualification. Foster care wasn't a profession for me and whether it is viewed as such now I don't know. I don't know whether it should be and I don't know if there need to be any changes in the work arrangements for foster carers.

Financial support

31. I got a fostering allowance, although I can't remember how much it was, but I never fostered for the money. I received a cheque from the local authority and I was given some extra if a child came with nothing or with very little. The extra money was to spend on the child for toys or for clothing and that's what it got spent on.
32. I also got extra money to buy beds and chests of drawers, but other than the money was for general day-to-day expenses, such as food or entertainment. I also got an enhanced allowance because I did emergency care and would get phone calls and placements in the middle of the night.

33. We were always doing stuff, especially in the holidays. We were never at home, we were always in parks having picnics, or whatever. What I did with the children was never dependent on whether I received any money to do something.
34. My daughter was born in 1991 and I was child minding at the time as well, so I had an income from that and I received income support because I was a single parent.
35. There was no material support provided. Some children came with bits and pieces, but I had built up a lot of resources through my child minding and through my own kids. I was sensible with money but spent what was necessary on good quality things and had quite a lot of things, such as clothes and toys for the kids to play with.
36. I do believe that the financial support was adequate for what I needed. I got things if I asked for them, especially if a child came with very little. I had a store of clothes that I could use for the younger children if they came with nothing, but it possibly wouldn't be adequate in general for other foster carers who didn't have the resources that I did. I think I was a pretty canny person with money.

Foster home and household

37. I was only at the flat in Dyce for about a year-and-a-half, before I moved into a three-bedroom, first floor flat in Aberdeen, where I stayed until 1993. Then I bought a four-bedroom house with a front garden and an enclosed rear garden.
38. My mum lived with me in Dyce for a while until she moved in with a partner, but that broke down and she moved back in with me once I'd moved to the flat and then she stayed in the house as well. Although my mum was there though, I was essentially fostering alone along with my son and daughter.
39. I don't remember what I told my children to prepare them for a foster child arriving. There were always children about in my home with my child-minding business, including my nephew for a while.

40. After I moved to the house, I had two bedrooms built on because I had two children that were going to be staying long term and I wanted to give them more space. I didn't get any help for that, although I don't think I asked for any.
41. After the extra bedrooms had been built on there were then five bedrooms and a bathroom with a shower over the bath upstairs. Downstairs there was a granny flat with an en-suite for my mother, a living room and a kitchen with a dining area. The front garden was open and there was a big area of grass that was owned by the council, where the older kids used to play football. The rear garden was totally enclosed and was secure for the younger children to play in.

Children fostered

42. I'm not sure how many children I have fostered over the years, but it must be in the hundreds, possibly even as many as a thousand. I took children as emergency placements, who should have only been with me for a short time, but who were often with me for longer. Many children were with me for more than a couple of months.
43. I fostered both boys and girls, ranging in age from a few weeks old to fourteen and fifteen, but I'm not sure how many I would have had at any one time. I always stayed within the limits of my registration for child minding because there would be more children during the day, so I probably fostered a maximum of six at one time. It was a very busy household at times, but it was nice.
44. All the children I fostered had been placed by the local authority, Aberdeen City, not by any agency such as Barnardos and I wasn't related to any of them.

Placement preparation

45. Generally, there wasn't much preparation for a child coming to stay with me as an emergency placement. I didn't often get planned placements, most of the time I would just get a phone call asking me if I had a bed and if I could take the child and they arrived a short time afterwards.

46. The more long-term placements had all started as emergency placements too and therefore there was no preparation for them either. I knew that I could have refused a placement, but I don't think I ever actually did. I would never know in advance what a child was going to be like until they arrived.
47. I don't think there was any matching of the children to me as an emergency foster carer.
48. Any background information I was given about a child was always very basic, although it's difficult to generalise because each placement was different. I would get a child's age and a very brief description of what they were coming from and the reason they were needing foster care. I don't think any educational history or needs or medical information was passed on initially. If a child was school age I would eventually get that information though, because I would have to make arrangements to get them to school. I think I would have been told if there was to be no contact between the child and their parents.
49. I would not initially be provided with a child's care plan when it was an emergency placement, that would normally come at the first meeting I would have with the child's social worker after the child had arrived, which was usually within a couple of days. I can't remember for every child, but I think that, in general, I would be given a copy of their care plan within a reasonable length of time, perhaps a week or so.
50. I don't know what steps might have been taken to prepare a child to come and live with me. I can't remember ever having the opportunity to meet any previous carers. I think that's the way emergency foster care was at that time. I would get a phone call during the day, or during the night, asking me if I could take a child and then the child would arrive, sometimes within half-an-hour. I don't think I ever met a child before they came to live with me.
51. It varied how quickly and easily a child settled in with me. Some children were reasonably settled within days, others didn't settle at all and some took weeks. It just

depended on the circumstances of the individual child. I think the presence of other children in the house made the settling in process for new children easier, because it wasn't all focussed on me. The children would have free access into the garden and would play with all the toys that were lying around and with each other.

52. I was involved in doing storybooks for some children, which I think are a good idea. I don't think I would have thought of such a thing, it was something someone, possibly a social worker, must have suggested to me. One child I did a storybook for was moving on to adoption and another was moving into a long-term placement. The storybook was like a Lifebook and contained information for the child about themselves and how they got to where they were. It had details of their birth, different memories, pictures and that kind of thing. It belonged to the child and it was something that they would take with them when they moved.
53. I didn't do that for every child, but the boy who was adopted had been with me since he was a baby and stayed for about eleven months. The social work were going to move him earlier to another foster care placement, but I offered to see the placement through until adoptive parents were found so that is what happened. I can't remember how long the process took, possibly two or three months, but in that time I had a chance to meet the adoptive parents several times before the child left. They came to my house and I took him to theirs. That was nice, although it didn't happen very often.
54. I am aware that one of the children I fostered has provided a statement to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and I have read a copy of that statement. I knew the girl as FEE FEE, although I am aware that her surname is now FEE. I first looked after FEE and her brother FEE in 1995, when she was about three or four and FEE was twelve or thirteen.
55. I think I had FEE and FEE twice, if I remember correctly. The first time would have been an emergency placement and the second time would have been more planned. I think the first time was because their mum had been arrested and the second time was because she had been sent to prison.

56. I think FEE probably settled a lot more quickly than her brother, because [REDACTED] was more aware of what was going on. FEE was the same age as my daughter and I also had another two foster children at that time, who were two little girls about the same age as well. They all got on really well and they were good company for each other and I think having other little ones like her made it easier for FEE. On the other hand, I think that made it more difficult for [REDACTED] because he was more aware and his mum's house wasn't that far away.
57. I can't remember specifically, but I'm sure I would have spoken to both FEE and [REDACTED] about their mum going to prison. I can't remember being given any specific guidance on how to deal with speaking to FEE and [REDACTED] about their mum's circumstances. I would have had conversations with their social worker and with my link worker about what was best for the children. Obviously I couldn't have treated both children the same because there was such a difference in their ages.
58. I think there needs to be preparation for a child being placed into foster care, or for moving placement, but that's not always possible. Placements do break down and then there's no preparation, the child is just moved. I got some children whose placements had broken down and who needed somewhere to go there and then, but there does need to be as much preparation as possible.

Daily routine and sleeping arrangements

59. Generally, depending on the children, they got up at 7:00 am, although that wasn't a hardfast rule. Once they were up, they would have breakfast and then I would let them watch a bit of telly for a while if it was the weekend. If it was during the week and the children were going to school or to nursery I would get them ready and then take them. I also took some children to toddler groups. After lunch the afternoons would be spent outside in the garden or playing in the house, depending on the age of the children. At the weekends we might go to the park, go for a picnic, or go swimming.
60. I don't remember giving children specific chores to do, it was more the case that I might ask a child to help out doing something. I didn't run my house by giving any of

the children a job and telling them they had to do it. I might ask one of them to tidy up the toys, or something like that, but it was the same for my own children as for the foster children. I didn't feel that I treated them any differently than I did my own children.

61. If there was a rule for my child it was a rule for all the children. If it was a rule for the foster children, or the children I was child-minding, it was a rule for my children as well. I don't remember what any specific rules were, but my expectations were the same for all the kids.
62. My mum lived downstairs in the granny flat when we lived in the house and my son and daughter had their own rooms most of the time. The foster boys and girls were in two different rooms, although sometimes they did share with my own children if needed. I had my own bedroom upstairs as well.
63. Some children did wet their bed, which meant I had to buy extra bedding and do extra washing. I had one boy who would quite often wet the bed twice a night. He eventually got an alarm from the hospital that was supposed to wake him up, but it didn't because he was such a sound sleeper and I would get up instead. The social work would have arranged for him to go to the hospital to get the alarm, but I actually took him to the appointments. I would have to wake the boy up, get him cleaned and changed and then change the bed and quite often he would be wet in the morning as well.
64. My son was a bedwetter for a period of time as well, but it wasn't a big deal. It was something that happened and something that had to be dealt with.
65. I don't remember whether I got any guidance on trying to explore why a child might be wetting the bed, but I do recall discussing that particular boy with his social worker and discussing bedwetting in general at the fostering association. I think I discussed it with the older children, but I can't specifically remember having a direct conversation about bedwetting.

Washing and bathing

66. The bathroom was upstairs with a shower over the bath and all the foster children had full access. They could lock the door if they wanted privacy. Obviously I had to help the younger children and, especially with the little girls, it was often easier putting them in the bath together. If they'd been outside in the garden and they were filthy it was better if they were in together with lots of bubbles and lots of toys.

Clothes and shoes

67. Some children arrived with some clothes and some only had the clothes they came in, however I had lots of clothes that I could change them into if need be. If they had come with very little I would get an allowance of a set amount to go and get clothes for them. It would usually come in the form of a voucher which could only be used in select shops so that meant all the money was spent on clothes for the children.
68. I did use charity shops, but only for toys or to buy clothes for my own kids. I never used that allowance to buy clothes for the foster kids in charity shops.
69. I would do all the washing and pressing of the clothes. When I first started fostering I didn't even have a washing machine so did all the washing in the bath.
70. The children all had their own clothes so they didn't have to share. There were chests of drawers in the bedrooms and the kids had their own couple of drawers, although sometimes they might share amongst themselves if they wanted to when they were a bit older.

Mealtimes

71. I tried to get all the children to eat together. I think it was a nice time for everyone to sit together as an extended family. I prepared and cooked all the meals and sometimes, if they wanted, some of the kids would help with any preparation or setting the table.

72. I don't think there were many times a child didn't like what I gave them. I tended to make homely, practical sort of meals, like soup, mince and tatties and stovies and I think most kids ate most of what they were given. I suppose there were times one of the children wouldn't eat what I had made and I would offer them an alternative, like a sandwich or something like a bit of toast, because I obviously couldn't cook countless meals.
73. Children have different appetites and I didn't insist any of them finish everything that was on their plates. My own children didn't always finish all their food, but I never made a big deal about it.
74. I am aware that **FEE** says in her statement that I used to feed her with a metal spoon. I may have helped her, but most kids at the age of four or five are a bit more independent and can feed themselves. It's not true that she wouldn't be offered anything else to eat, nor that I force-fed her chocolate mousse and that she was fed out-of-date mousse. I find those memories that she has strange and I'm not sure how she thinks those things happened.
75. None of the children were allowed to help themselves to food. If they wanted something they had to come and ask and, generally, they would get it. They would have breakfast, a mid-morning snack, lunch, a mid-afternoon snack, supper and they would quite often have a snack before bedtime as well. If they wanted something else and came and asked me I would offer them fruit, because there was always plenty of fruit in the house.
76. I didn't want children to help themselves because I felt it was respectful for them to come and ask for something. That was the rule for my kids and it was the rule for the foster children. There was no difference. None of the children, including my own, would have been given a snack close to meal times if they asked for one because I wouldn't want them to ruin their appetite.

Leisure time

77. The back garden in the house was secure and so I could leave the back door open and the children could wander out and in. There were always lots of toys lying about, both inside and outside and they could have magazines and comics if they wanted.
78. There was a TV in the living room, but I did have restrictions as to when it could be on. There was no TV in the mornings because the children would have to get ready for nursery or school. When they came back they would sometimes be allowed to watch cartoons before supper, but it wasn't on all day.
79. If the older ones were independent enough they could go shopping or to the cinema. I had one older girl who went on the bus to school and who would go into town to meet her friends and go shopping.
80. I treated the children I fostered the same as my own. Whatever my children were involved with, the foster children were as well. If my children went to activities, the foster children, if they weren't just there for two or three days, had the opportunity to go as well.
81. My son and my daughter were both in the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Brigade. They also went to Sunday School and they did extra school activities, for instance my son was in the chess club. Depending on how long I had a foster child, I tried to get them involved in things like that too. I had two boys at the same time as I had the boy that wet the bed and they both went to the Boys' Brigade with my son.
82. If a foster child had been involved in things before they came to me I tried to keep that up as much as possible. That obviously depended on transportation, but I did try and do that as much as possible and I don't think any child missed out on much.
83. I gave the children who were with me for longer some pocket money and they could spend that however they wanted, whether it was on a magazine, a book, or toys. I did try and encourage the younger children I fostered to save if they wanted to buy

something bigger, but the older ones would spend it as soon as they got it. I think my son and daughter set a good example because they didn't always spend all of their pocket money at once, they would save it up if there was something special they wanted. Sometimes the foster children would pick that up from them.

Trips and holidays

84. We were always busy doing something. We went for a lot of picnics in the park and I socialised with a lot of other child-minders from the association. I joined a group that met every week and the kids that I had would go to the crèche while we met. The other child-minders obviously had lots of kids and I had lots of kids, so we did lots of things in the holidays. We would all go to the park, where there might be fifteen or twenty kids running around. We also went swimming and I remember one time there were two adults and fifteen kids at the pool. Another time I took them all to Camperdown Park in Dundee and we saw all the animals.
85. Term time was obviously different because the children all had nursery or school and at the weekend we would sometimes be glad just to have a day at home.
86. We did go on holiday to a caravan in Nairn a couple of times, but it was more day trips that we went on because I had my child-minding business. I can't remember any children particularly going on holidays with the school, but that may well have happened. I know that FEE says that her brother was sent to Christian camp for a couple of weeks, but I don't remember that either.

Schooling

87. It was generally the case that the foster children would remain in the school they had been in when they came to live with me. Some of the children attended family centres and I had to drive them there and pick them up. When FEE came to live with me, she was due to start nursery and after discussions with the social worker it was agreed that she would attend the same nursery as my daughter, which was local to us. This worked out well as it was also local to her mum's house.

88. I think the educational attainment of the older children would probably have been affected by being in care. I don't think that was the case so much for the younger ones. I think it's more difficult for the older ones being in foster care and having to explain why to other children at school. I think it probably affected quite a lot of them. In my case, because it was mainly emergency care that I did, it tended to be the case that the children didn't go to school for a couple of days, or they were transported to school by either me or the social work, so that there was less disruption for them.
89. Some of the children I looked after had special educational needs and I think I felt equipped to support the younger children with that, but it was a bit more challenging with some of the older ones. I hadn't experienced that with my own kids and it could be more challenging.
90. The little boy that I looked after at the same time as the bed wetter went to a special base in one of the schools and he had quite a lot of challenging needs. He was a lovely little boy, but he had a younger developmental age than his years. I think I found it easy enough to deal with because of his age, it was more the older ones that I found more challenging if there were violent behavioural issues. The violence was never really aimed at me, it was more the social worker, who I think a lot of the older ones blamed for taking them away from their mum.
91. I understood it, it just wasn't easy to deal with and I'm sure I must have been given support by the social work, although I can't think of any specific instance.
92. If the children's parents weren't involved with the child I did all the parenting things. I went to parents' evenings and I went to any other school events there might have been.
93. I never had kids who were of an age where they might have been taught skills or given training or instruction to equip them for adult life. I taught the kids I fostered the kind of life skills that I taught my own children. If we were making a sandwich, for example, I would teach them how to butter the bread and they would choose what went in it, just

things that you would do with your own kids. I don't think I ever sat a child down and told them about life skills, it was more everyday things like helping me cook, cutting up the vegetables and that kind of thing.

94. Homework was generally done at the kitchen table because I was there if they needed any help or support and my son was there doing his homework so he could help too. We had a period of time, maybe after tea when they would sit down and do their homework before they could watch the telly. They didn't seem to get as much homework as I did as a child though. There might be a wee bit of reading, some spelling, or writing a couple of sentences, it wasn't a huge amount. They could help each other and I was there to help as well if they needed it.

Healthcare

95. I always discussed any healthcare issues with the social work department, but if there were any doctors' appointments, it was generally me that took the children. Children stayed with their own doctor's unless their social worker made the decision for their doctor to be changed.
96. Other than what my kids got through healthcare visits, doctors' appointments, or things through school, there were no regular, routine health checks unless there was something brought up through their care plan. If, for example, a child needed glasses, or had hearing problems then I would make sure they got to their appointments. I don't think I ever had any kids that missed any appointments.
97. I would have kept a note of any health issues in daily diaries that I kept for my own records, which I destroyed once a child had moved on. If anything came up I shared it with the children's social workers at our meetings and I kept the diaries to make sure I didn't forget anything. I am sure I would have been expected to record certain things but I can't remember if there was specific guidance on what I was supposed to record.

98. The school kids would get regular dental checks through school, but if any child didn't have a dentist I would try and arrange to get them an appointment through my own dentist.
99. I am aware that FEE says in her statement that she had hearing issues, but I don't remember that. I don't remember her having problems with her hearing and needing to go to the ear, nose and throat clinic.

Christmas and birthdays

100. Christmas was crazy. I used to have great fun shopping for them. Depending what kids I had, they always had a stocking with a banana, a tangerine and an apple in it, along with a toothbrush and toothpaste. They all got presents as well, which tended to be books, toys and clothes. I never got any extra help for buying them presents, that would have been covered in the allowance I got for each child. We also had a big Christmas meal on the day, there were decorations and there was a tree.
101. It was more or less the same on a child's birthday. There would be balloons, banners, they would get their presents and they would get to choose exactly what they wanted to eat for their supper. If they couldn't decide I would give them a list and quite often it was pizza. It was exactly the same with my kids, although they were a bit boring and always wanted macaroni cheese. There was also a birthday cake with candles and birthday cards, it was nice chaos.

Discipline

102. I can't specifically remember disciplining children. My kids were reasonably well behaved and with the older ones I sat them down and told them what my expectations were. With the younger ones I would try and explain what they should and shouldn't do. I did raise my voice, or change the tone of my voice, but I don't ever remember shouting at any of the kids.

103. I never hit a child. When my son was little I remember smacking him, however once I started child-minding I went to smack him and stopped. I realised that I was allowed to smack, but I couldn't smack the children I was looking after and that was the last time I ever raised my hand to any child.
104. Chores were never used as punishment. I might have sent a child to their room, but I can't specifically remember. I probably told an older child that they weren't allowed to go out, but again I can't think of any specific occasions that happened.
105. I can't remember if I was given any guidance on disciplining children. Discussions around discipline tended to happen during meetings with the fostering association and meetings with the social work.
106. I don't remember any really challenging behaviour that resulted in a massive meltdown and I can't really say what behaviour might have resulted in a sanction or punishment.
107. I would have kept a record of any sanction or punishment that I might have given. I don't know if it was something that would have been expected of me, but it would certainly be something I would have shared with the child's social worker. I would have noted anything more significant in my diary. If, for example, I grounded a child for a few days I would share that, but something more minor, I wouldn't.

Relationship with foster children

108. I asked the foster children to call me Sheila and I had a good relationship with most of them. I found it easier to nurture the younger children, although I did nurture the older ones to the best of my ability and as much as they would let me. That was where the challenge was for me with the older children who didn't necessarily want nurturing from me because I wasn't their mum.
109. If my daughter jumped on my knee and wanted a hug and if a foster child jumped on my other knee and wanted a hug too, then so be it. If a foster child wanted a kiss or a cuddle that was fine and if they didn't, that was fine too.

110. All of the children I fostered were treated in exactly the same way I treated my own kids and my kids were really accepting of any child who was there. Quite often they would get up in the morning and there would be a new child sitting at the breakfast table, but they just accepted that and generally they got on well with all the children.

Contact with family (other than siblings)

111. I would be guided on whether children had contact with their parents or other family members by the social work department. It varied how that contact was organised. I had some children who had access at a family centre. One family centre was pretty close to me and it was used quite a lot. I would take the children there and then pick them up and the children would have access to their parents with a family centre worker present. With other children, some parents came to my house, some were taken by their social worker to their parents' house. I don't ever remember taking a child to their house myself, it was always somewhere else.
112. I spoke to some of my foster children's parents and I was happy for their parents to phone my house, if there weren't any problems with contact. They could not come to my house though without it being arranged beforehand.
113. I felt it wasn't my position to try and encourage contact between the children and their parents. I felt that was the social worker's role because I didn't know what circumstances they came from.
114. I did, on a couple of occasions, raise concerns that I had about contact between a child and their parents. The child was coming back from visits quite distressed and I passed that on to their social worker. I think it was slightly different with my situation though, because the children weren't with me for a long period of time, so I'm not sure what may have changed.
115. I don't think I can comment on whether anything should be changed about arrangements for contact with foster children's parents or other family members. I

didn't know the full circumstances when children came to me because it was emergency placements. Generally they would come during the night, or late evening and I didn't feel it was my position to give advice on contact. A child would have had to be with me longer so that I could have got to know them better. Once I did get to know a child better I felt more able to say what should and should not happen, but in the first three months or so that wasn't my role.

116. I know that FEE says in her statement that she didn't have any visits with her mum and that nobody ever spoke to her about when she would see her mum again. Her mum was either in police custody or in prison, so it is quite possible that she didn't see her. I would have spoken to her about when she would see her mum again though, because I spoke to kids all the time. They would ask me when they would see their mum again and I was as honest as I could be. If I knew when it was happening I would tell them and if I didn't I would suggest we could speak to the social worker about it.

Siblings

117. I think the social work tried to place siblings in foster care together as much as possible, however I do recall a family of four who were needing a placement and I could only take two. I already had two foster children with me so the other two had to go somewhere else.
118. They could still have contact with each other though. With that particular family I spoke with the social work beforehand and I would contact the other foster carers, or they would contact me and we would meet up. We would either go to each other's houses or we would meet up in the park and allow the kids to play with each other.
119. I think there can always be improvements, but at that time arrangements such as that were the best they could be.

Visitors

120. The frequency of visits from the children's social workers was different for each child. It wasn't the case that they would visit once a week. If the placement was going okay it might be every two or three weeks, if the placement was new it might be weekly.
121. Some of the older children were taken out by their social worker and maybe taken for an ice cream, or to a café, or bowling. With the younger ones they might come to the house, play with them and chat with them. They would chat with me too, to try and find out if there were any problems and how the placement was going. All the visits were announced because otherwise they might not have got me at home.
122. When they met with me we would discuss things like healthcare, education, if there were any problems or issues and access to the child's parents, if that was permitted.
123. I can't remember how often my social worker visited. The visits were regular, but I don't recall if it was once a month, or once every two months, or whatever. They were always at the end of a phone though if I had any issues or anything I needed to discuss. They might not necessarily be in the office when I phoned, but they would always get back to me.
124. When my social worker came to see me we would chat about the placements and how I was finding things. They didn't generally speak with the children unless a child was there, but they wouldn't make a point of speaking to any of the children.
125. No person came to inspect my home. Health visitors who were involved with the younger children would come to my house and one of the children I had was being educated at home so somebody came to do that, but visits were normally social workers or my link worker.
126. Times are different now, but I think at that time that I found the visits appropriate and what kids needed.

Review of care/placement

127. I went to children's hearings and I attended quite a lot of child care review meetings once a child had been with me for some time. There were children who were only with me for two or three weeks though and I didn't go to meetings for them.
128. I had forms that I needed to fill in for the review meetings and I therefore had an input in those meetings. I would say how the placement was going, make comments on the child's behaviour, their healthcare and that kind of thing. After the meetings I would be given updated copies of their care plans and I think I was kept up to date and fully informed as to each foster child's welfare.
129. The child's views on being in care were sought, although that was obviously more difficult with the younger ones. The social workers met with the younger ones and would try and establish their views through drawing pictures and chatting with them. The older ones had forms to fill in. Either I or the social worker would help them in expressing their views if they needed it.
130. I don't think any of the children I looked after had an independent advocate.
131. I think it would be difficult to say whether foster children were being listened to as opposed to their views being sought as a formality. A child thinking they are being listened to is different to them actually being listened to. A lot of times a child might ask for unobtainable things, like, for example, more contact with their parents, but that wasn't my decision. I think the children were listened to, but their wishes may not always have been acted on because it might not have been possible or it might not have been in their best interests.
132. The older children that I had were damaged to different degrees and I think, regardless of what you did for the more damaged ones, they would have felt that it wasn't right. That it wasn't what they wanted. I had a twelve-year-old girl who had been in and out of care most of her life and she always felt that she wasn't listened to. She was, but it just wasn't exactly and fully what she wanted, because she wanted to be at home with

her mum. That wasn't possible and therefore that clouded her opinion on whether she was being listened to.

133. There is always room for improvement, but I think the process for being kept informed about a child's welfare, or listening to a child's views was appropriate for the time.

Records

134. I don't remember being given written or verbal guidance or instructions on the keeping of records.

135. The diaries I kept were as reminders for me so that I could pass on anything that I felt was important to the social work or to my link worker. I don't think I was expected to keep any other records. I filled in forms for childcare reviews, which I gave to the social work and I would record anything that might have been important in those forms if it was asked.

136. I held onto the diaries, I didn't hand them over to the social work department, they were just for me. I would let the social workers see anything I'd written about a particular child, but if I had a number of children and was dealing with different social workers, not everything was for their specific child. I kept the diaries on my own initiative, I don't remember being advised to keep them.

137. I did get paperwork from the social workers regarding such things as decisions that had been made at children's panels. I retained all those documents along with the forms I would initially get when a child came into my care.

138. Once I stopped fostering I destroyed everything, including my diaries, although I don't know if I was expected to or not. I destroyed everything because I felt it wasn't appropriate to keep it.

139. I think there should be a lot more guidance on forms to be kept and what information should be recorded. Perhaps forms are provided nowadays, but there was nothing

back then other than the things that need to be filled in for the children's panels and the childcare reviews.

Moving placement

140. The child's social worker and myself would have been involved in the process for preparing them to leave a foster care placement and move to another foster carer or another care setting. There were also Family Aides involved with some of the kids who might have been involved for transporting the children.
141. I was guided by the social worker on how the process of a child going to a new placement was dealt with. I would get the information about the new carers and I would speak to the child, but only after the social worker had done that. The social worker would tell them about the new placement, where it was and they would give them the details about the family and what kind of house it was. I would speak to the child on the back of that and if they had any questions I would try and answer them and if I couldn't then I would get the answer from the social worker. I met some of the children's subsequent carers, but not them all.
142. Generally children were moved because they were only supposed to be with me for emergency foster care. The children were all told when they came to me that it was an emergency placement and that they would be moving on at some time. Sometimes that happened in two or three weeks, sometimes it would be in three or four months. It just depended on what placements were available.
143. One child did say that they didn't want to go and I ended up keeping them for two years. I had the twelve year old girl I mentioned for two-and-a-half years. She wanted to go home to her mother, but because she couldn't do that she wanted to stay with me. I actually saw that girl a few months ago. She phones occasionally and turns up to see me.
144. I think with older or more challenging children there would need to be a bit more support than there was. I had several placements that I knew weren't good for my

household and the other children and I asked for them to be moved. Even though I asked, I don't think that changed anything though. They were only moved when somewhere else was eventually found.

145. There should be more options available like more foster carers, but at that time there just wasn't. I wanted things to be properly planned for the children so that they knew what was happening because I knew that was what was best for the kids. I was quite good at saying what placements were going well and what were not. I only once had a child who had to be removed immediately, although I don't remember the specifics of why. I don't think the support from the social work department in that case was sufficient.
146. I know that FEE [REDACTED] says in her statement that mum just appeared one day out of the blue, but I can't remember FEE [REDACTED] mum ever coming to my house. I don't think her and [REDACTED] leaving would have happened the way she said it did. I do believe they were with me twice, once when their mother had been arrested by the police and the next time after she had been sentenced to imprisonment. I think they went back to their mum when they left me the first time, but I think their mum had been given a sentence of ten years, so they would have gone to another placement the second time. I can't remember where that was.

Leaving the care system

147. None of the children I looked after left the care system when they left me and I don't know what the process was for preparing them. Some of them would have been going home, but they would still have had social work involvement.

Complaints

148. If I had any complaints about the service of the local authority or any aspect of a child's care, I would make them through my link worker. If I thought anything wasn't right I would have brought it up at our meetings. If it was something to do with a particular child I would speak to the child's social worker.

149. I think that procedure was appropriate at the time. I don't think that anything I felt strongly enough about wasn't dealt with properly.

Convictions

150. I am aware that the Inquiry have a copy of an Extract Conviction Report detailing the charges that were made against me and of which I was convicted at Aberdeen Sheriff Court on 31 May 2018. I was sentenced to 240 hours community service on 26 June 2018. I don't recall exactly what the charges were, but I agree that what is detailed in the Extract Conviction Report is correct and that the charges of which I was convicted were:

- i. Assault to Injury, committed between [REDACTED] 1993 and [REDACTED] 1994 on [REDACTED] who was then aged twelve;
- ii. Assault, committed between [REDACTED] 1995 and [REDACTED] 1995 on [REDACTED] FEE who was then aged between four and five;
- iii. Assault to Injury, committed between [REDACTED] 1998 and [REDACTED] 1999 on [REDACTED], who was then aged six;
- iv. Assault, committed between [REDACTED] 1999 and [REDACTED] 2001 on [REDACTED] who was then aged between nine and twelve;
- v. Assault, committed between [REDACTED] 2000 and [REDACTED] 2001 on [REDACTED] who was then aged between four and five; and
- vi. Assault, committed between [REDACTED] 2000 and [REDACTED] 2001 on [REDACTED] who was then aged between three and four.

151. I did not have any convictions before I became a foster carer and I did not commit the offences of which I was convicted, it is as simple as that.

152. I stopped child-minding and fostering at the same time because I opened my own business.

153. I assume the local authority would have checked for any convictions with the police before I started fostering, but I don't know what those checks would have been. The local authority did not provide any references for my current employment in a supermarket.
154. I have more memories of some of the children named in the charges than others, however I think they got together and made up their stories. I think it was all started by [REDACTED] who read something in the papers about me, but I do not want to go into what they read. I know that at least two of them have gone for compensation and I think it's partly about money.
155. I think, because the stories were all so similar, that they all got together and decided what to say. At least three of them said I hit them with a belt and that never happened. I have no proof that it didn't happen, but I only ever smacked my own son and even that was only with my hand. The judge said that he had to find me guilty. I read from that that he didn't really believe it, however on the evidence he was obliged to find me guilty.

Allegations of abuse

Awareness of abuse

156. I was not aware of any behaviour committed by any person that I would consider to be abuse of foster children whilst in foster care. I do not consider any discipline, punishment, or other practice by me toward any foster child to have been abuse, but I can't speak for anyone else.
157. I am aware that FEE [REDACTED] says in her statement that I'd had a child removed from my care before she was placed with me, but I have absolutely no idea what that is referring to. I have never had a child removed from me.

Reporting of abuse

158. If a child had any concerns or worries they could have spoken to their social worker, or to a Family Aide, if one was involved, or to someone at the Family Centre. A lot of the children were involved with Family Centres or were transported by Family Aides.
159. No foster child ever raised any concerns in relation to abuse in foster care that I'm aware of either with me, or with any other foster carer.
160. I think the older children would probably have been more cautious about speaking to people, but that's in general, not just about abuse. I don't think the younger ones would have any problems, it's more of an age thing than an issue a child in care might have.
161. I think some of the children that I looked after had been exposed to things that they shouldn't have seen. Some had seen a lot of alcohol abuse and a lot of drug abuse and probably, along with that, physical abuse. I can't think of anything specific, but I do know that FEE mother used to take her out shoplifting. She would hide the things she was stealing in FEE buggy and she would also send FEE out with FEE to go shoplifting for things to sell. That kind of thing damages children.
162. I would have passed on any concerns I had to my social worker or my link worker, but I don't know if anything would have happened as a result.
163. I may have been given written or verbal guidance on the reporting of abuse of children, but I can't remember.
164. Even with the benefit of hindsight I did not see or become aware of anything that I thought should have reported. Everything was discussed at the time and any concerns I had I would pass on to the social worker because they were coming to my house on a regular basis.

Allegations of abuse for which there has been no criminal conviction

165. I am aware that the Inquiry has a copy of the Complaint of the Procurator Fiscal for Aberdeen Sheriff Court, which lists the charges of which I was convicted and also a further three charges. Again I can't remember exactly what they were, but I am aware that the Complaint lists them as:

- i. Assault, committed between [REDACTED] 1990 and [REDACTED] 1991 on [REDACTED] who was then aged nine, of which I was acquitted;
- ii. Assault, committed between [REDACTED] 1993 and [REDACTED] 1994 on [REDACTED], who was then aged five, which was dropped by the prosecution; and
- iii. Assault, committed between [REDACTED] 1996 and [REDACTED] 1997 on [REDACTED] who was then aged six, again which was dropped by the prosecution.

166. I never did those things and I have never been the subject of any other complaint in relation to the alleged abuse of foster children.

Reporting to police/criminal proceedings

167. As far as I'm aware the charges that were made against me were the only alleged abuse of foster children who had been in my care that was reported to the police. I do not know which police station had been dealing with the complaints that had been made.

Prior statements

168. I have not given any statements about my time as a foster carer and I did not give the police a statement when I was charged.

Specific allegations that have been made to the Inquiry

169. I am aware that FEE has made a number of allegations against me to the Inquiry. I remember FEE as a fairly happy little girl. She and my daughter got on really well and I was so surprised when I read her statement that this is what her memory is.
170. I can't remember whether I ever gave FEE a sanction or punishment, but it would not have been anything serious like she says in her statement. I have never hit a child with my hand or with a belt, even though I know I have been convicted of that.
171. I have read in FEE statement that she says *'Sheila was horrible to me. She gave me into trouble all the time and was always shouting at me. I was walloped on my little hands or slapped on the back of my head every other day. She'd come down to my level, hold me by the wrists and then she'd wallop me again and again on the back of my hands. The sting afterwards was very sore. This started not long after I went to live with her'*
172. I absolutely accept that if a child was treated in the way FEE described that would be abuse, but it absolutely never happened. The passage of time has not affected my recollection whatsoever.
173. I think FEE memory is all jumbled up. She starts off saying in her statement what a wonderful time living with her mum was and yet at the end she says it was horrible. I don't think she has a full recollection of where anything happened. She's also blamed nearly every foster carer for the same thing.
174. I have read that FEE also says *'One of the reasons I would get hit was for helping myself to food (...) I'd take a block of cheese out of the fridge and just start eating it. I used to get smacked if I did that at Sheila's. I was clearly hungry, but she still refused me food. Her own children were allowed to help themselves to food in the fridge (...) I remember dragging the chair over to the fridge and getting another mousse. Sheila found me with it and she walloped me on the hands. always remembers*

Sheila shouting, "I don't get enough money to give you two chocolate mousses after every meal!". I only remember it because he used to tell me.'

175. That would certainly be abuse if a child was treated in that way, but it didn't happen. It may have happened at FEE home with her mother, but it certainly didn't happen in my house.
176. FEE continues *'Any time Sheila's daughter got hurt when we were playing, I got the blame for it (...) banged her head one time and we ran to Sheila and explained what happened, and I got walloped for it'*
177. I have not hit a child since my son was four. I would never smack a child. If a child gets hurt they get sympathy, they get empathy and they get sent out to play again, as long as nothing has fallen off.
178. I have also read that FEE says *'I was force-fed chocolate mousse. I didn't want to eat it and Sheila rammed the metal spoon into my face. The chocolate was all over my face and I was crying. My brother intervened and said that I didn't want it, that I'd had enough. I was always crying at Sheila's. I was always hysterical. I think the force-feeding happened more than once'*
179. That absolutely never happened. I have never force-fed a child, which I accept would be abuse.
180. FEE has been through many traumatic events in her life, which have maybe damaged her. She seems confused and conflicted about events that have happened in her life, and about where and when they have happened. She even writes in her statement that she may be wrong with ages and dates, which makes me wonder if she is misremembering what has happened to her and who did it to her. She accused her step dad of hitting her with a belt and then attributes that to me as well. She also seems to accuse all foster carers of similar things.

Helping the Inquiry

181. I'm sure things are very different now to how they were when I was fostering in the eighties and nineties, but I'm not involved in childcare anymore, so I don't know.
182. I think there will always be kids who are damaged, but they are damaged whether they go into foster care or not. It is how you try and best support them that is important, but I don't have a magic wand for that. I tried to do the best that I could to support the children and I think I did a good job, although some say that I didn't.
183. You can't protect anybody that is involved in childcare and perhaps I was even more vulnerable because I was a single parent. Anybody can turn round and say anything and my conviction is a prime example. I had no evidence to say that it didn't happen other than my mum and my daughter saying that it didn't.
184. Children should be listened to, but I don't know how you can tell what is the truth and what is not. I can understand people believing children in care, but to ruin somebody's life is awful. All I know is that what I was convicted of was not true and that is what is so hard. I could have appealed the conviction, but my solicitor told me I could have been given a custodial sentence. I have no proof that it didn't happen so I decided not to appeal.
185. I think children should have a diary for themselves about their own day to day experiences in care. It can be written up by their foster carer to record how they were when they first came to stay, how long they took to settle, what they did or didn't like to eat and any other things that may happen. That diary could then go to every placement with the child and they could start writing in it themselves when they are old enough to do so. I think that would offer them a clearer timeline of how things unfolded in their lives and fill any gaps that might be created in their memories later on.

Other information

186. My time fostering was a very interesting time. I loved it and I don't believe I ever did anything that would have seriously damaged any children emotionally. I did the best I could, which I think was pretty okay and I'm just sad about what ultimately happened.
187. My conviction has impacted my whole family, my job, my physical health and my mental health. It has impacted every aspect of my life and the allegations are not true. I reached the age of sixty without so much as a parking ticket and now I have convictions for child abuse. It seems as if everybody believes the kids and not me.
188. 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..... 3/6/22