

Appendix 1

Response to S21 notice– Argyll and Bute Council response to evidence led in the course of the Foster Care and Boarding Out Case - day 295, 14.06.2022, Ann FQA

Thank you for inviting us to reflect on and respond to the evidence provided to the Inquiry by Ann on day 295. We are deeply saddened to read the evidence of Ann about her regrettable experiences in care and of the abuse she related; as we have been by the evidence from the many other brave and courageous victim of abuse in foster care in Scotland who have given evidence to the Inquiry.

We can respond as follows

1. In the light of the evidence, what reflections do you have on your Part B response to the Inquiry's Section 21 notice dated 27th August 2019. Do you wish to submit a revised version of Part B of your response? If so, please do so in a separate addendum.

In light of the testimony of Ann, presented to the Inquiry on 14.06.2022, we have had the opportunity to fully reflect on Ann's evidence and to review our records in respect of Ann's time on foster care. We have submitted a revised version of our Part B response, this is attached as an addendum.

2. What lessons do you suggest should be learned from the evidence?

It appears that the abuse Ann related to the Inquiry was not known to Argyllshire County Council at the time and there was therefore no opportunity for the council to undertake a learning review at the time.

We have undertaken a detailed review of the somewhat limited records held in respect of Ann's time in care, along with Ann's evidence of the abuse she related to the inquiry the hands of her foster carers.

We have been unable to identify, from our records or from Ann's evidence, that the abuse was raised with the Children's Officer or other professionals at the time, and there do not appear to be any obvious indicators in the records that Ann was being abused by the foster carers that were missed or ignored at the time and we have not identified any specific learning in respect of Ann's care.

We do note that professional practice in connection with the care and supervision of children in foster care, along with the legal and regulatory frameworks, assessments and supervision of foster carers, attitudes to the place of children in society, to children in care and to child abuse have developed very significantly in Scotland since the time Ann was in care. We would expect that the changes in systems and processes across Scotland since the time Ann was in care would make it considerably less likely that the abuse Ann related would happen today and that if abuse did happen there is a much higher likelihood that it would be identified and appropriately responded to.

3. In the light of the evidence, what changes do you suggest should be made to protect children from abuse in foster care?

As Identified in our response to question 2 there have been very significant changes in legislation, regulation, systems and processes which provide better protection for children in foster care in Scotland and note that these need to be subject to continuous review and further improvement.

We note the issues and concerns identified by care experienced people in Scotland through the Independent Care Review and as being progressed by The Promise.

Based on consideration of the evidence provided by Ann and a review of available records there are no specific changes we would suggest to the Inquiry. There are however wider themes which we believe continue to be significant in seeking to further improve the care and protection of children in foster care. These seek to make it less likely that children will be abused by foster carers in the future and that where any child has concerns about the quality of their care or any abuse, there are robust pathways to promptly and effectively identify and respond to these. We suggest that this includes;

Further improving the recruitment, assessment, approval, supervision, monitoring, support and training of Foster Carers

Ensuring all children in foster care access proactive independent advocacy services, a child friendly complaints process and robust independent reviewing of their care.

Embedding children's rights based approach to all aspects of Scotland's Care system including fully implementing UNCRC.

Ensuring Social Workers, and other professionals in children's lives, have sufficient time, skills training, support and supervision to building and maintain strong, secure, trusting relationships with children in foster care, and that these are based on trauma responsive principles and values and make it more likely that concerns will be heard and responded to at the earliest opportunity.