

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

LVC [REDACTED]

Support person present: No


1. My name is LVC [REDACTED]. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1972. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Kelso. My late father, [REDACTED], had various jobs mostly involving plant machinery. My mum, [REDACTED] is still alive. I have one sister [REDACTED] who is a year and a half older than me. The only time she was in care with me was when I was in the Priory in Selkirk when I was three or four. I have no real memories of this.
3. My mum and dad split up when I was around eighteen months old. My sister and I then stayed with our dad. My dad regularly had different women coming to live with us. He often worked twelve hour shifts and I think part of the reason he wanted a woman living with us was so that they could look after us when he was working. Often, when dad didn't have a woman I stayed with my gran, my dad's mum. She was fantastic. My mum never tried to keep in touch with us. My dad told me when I was about five that my mum had died and that she was now a scarecrow in the field. It was only at eight I found out she was still alive.
4. My mum sometimes said she was coming to see us but never appeared or she arrived drunk and made excuses to go away after only a few minutes. We always built our hopes up to see her and she let us down.

5. One of my dad's girlfriends had three of her own children and she wasn't nice to me. We had to line up for food and I was usually the last in the line. One day she tied me up and gagged me. When my dad got home I was still tied up and he went mental at her. We had a social worker who at that time I think was Tom Welsh from the Kelso social work office. I think we had a social worker because one of the women who stayed with my dad was mental.
6. I was taken to children's hearing's when I was still staying with my dad because I was getting involved breaking into things for money. Nothing happened at these hearings apart from me being told to behave.
7. I kept running away from home because I wasn't happy and I was usually caught and taken home by the police. One time the police came to see me at home and I jumped out the second floor window and ran away. The last time I ran away the police caught me and told me that they were fed up with me running away and asked me what I wanted to do. I told them that I didn't want to go home so they took me to the Priory children's home in Selkirk. There wasn't a children's hearing or anything. I was eleven at the time.

Priory Children's Home, Selkirk.

8. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Howdenhall assessment centre, Edinburgh

32. Inside the front door of Howdenhall was another door which was locked. The staff had to use keys on either side to unlock it. Inside that door was a reception then a hallway. I was in a group called the Wombles because I was one of the youngest there. There was another group of boys just further along the corridor and they were the senior group. They were aged fourteen up to sixteen. There was a girls' wing but the only time we really saw them was when we went for our food. There were probably about fifty children altogether. The age range was from about nine up to sixteen.
33. I am not sure how many staff worked there because it was a big building. Most of the time there were two members of staff with us. The staff I remember were all male. They were GQB, Mr GPX, HYY, Mr [REDACTED] and there was a PE teacher but I can't remember his name. If something kicked off in the seniors group the two members of staff would fly out the room and leave us on our own.

34. I had a single room and the door was locked at night. All that was in the room was a bed and there was a blue light that was left on all the time. Staff regularly passed and looked in through a bit glass or an eye-hole to see that we were alright. There might have been a wardrobe in my room but I am not sure.

Routine at Howdenhall

First day

35. I remember getting a fright when I arrived at Howdenhall because all the doors were locked and it was basically like a prison. When I got there I was put into a small room where there were about ten or fifteen other lads aged from about nine up to thirteen. I can't remember what staff spoke to me that first day but I remember being told that I was to behave myself otherwise I would be put in the closed block upstairs.

Mornings and bedtime

36. In the morning someone either unlocked my bedroom door or a bell rang which meant we were to get up, dressed and go down for breakfast. We would gather and sit in the Wombles room until we were allowed to go into the dining room to get our breakfast. Everyone ate at the same time. We were given lunch at Howdenhall and I seem to think we were given it in a bag to eat in the Wombles room. We were in this room until tea-time. After tea we would go back to the Wombles room until bed time. I think we went to bed about 9pm and the seniors went at 10pm.

Mealtimes/Food

37. I can't remember what the food was like but I don't remember ever going hungry or there ever being any issues with food. As far as I recall if you were served food you didn't like, you just didn't eat it and you didn't get anything else in its place. There was no punishment for not eating the food. I never saw anyone getting force fed.

Washing/bathing

38. I can't remember when we showered or bathed but I am sure we would have been supervised in there to stop us from mucking about.

Clothing/uniform

39. We just wore our own clothes. We didn't have a uniform. I think I got a clothing grant and when we needed new clothes staff would take us to the shops. Our clothes weren't labelled so I am not sure how we got our own clothes back after it had been taken away and laundered.

Leisure time

40. The seniors used to have a pool table and there may have been a pool table in the Wombles room. There was also a TV in there and that was it. There were no games to play or books to read. Occasionally we would get to watch a film and we would go into the seniors room for that. We did have PE sometimes in the gym hall but we never got to go outside. None of us went home at the weekend.

Trips and holidays

41. I was never taken anywhere on holiday or even had any day trips anywhere.

Schooling

42. After breakfast we would go back into the Wombles room and the seniors would go to their room. We then just spent all day in this room. There were probably about twelve Wombles and the room was pretty small. We just sat there all day and sometimes watched the television. There were two members of staff usually in there with us. I don't remember ever getting any sort of schooling at Howdenhall or getting taught anything.

Healthcare

43. I don't remember ever seeing a doctor and I don't know who dealt with any medical issues. I never went to the dentist.

Work

44. The only chores I remember doing was cleaning, mopping and polishing the toilets and shower rooms, and mopping the hall floors. We usually did this every day after the breakfast. That maybe took us an hour or so. They showed us how to polish the taps.

Visitors

45. Saturday and Sunday was visiting day. Boys who the staff trusted not to run away were put in charge of the front door to unlock it and let the parents in. Most of the times the boy would run off. I never got any visitors, not even my dad. I don't think I had a social worker when I was at Howdenhall. I definitely didn't get a visit from a social worker when I was there.

Running away

46. I once talked about running away and the staff must have heard about it. HYY HYY and Mr Smith took me into a room and told me that if I was thinking about running away they had ways to stop me. That was when HYY showed me the closed block upstairs. It was basically a cell. All that was in it was a bed and a bit frosted glass where light came in. It was bare.

Review of care / detention

47. I believe that I was supposed to be getting assessed when I was at Howdenhall but I was never aware of this happening. No-one came to assess me or even to tell me what was going on.

External Inspections

48. I never saw anyone official coming in to inspect Howdenhall but that doesn't mean it didn't happen.

Discipline

49. If you were out of control and going mental they would put you in the closed block upstairs. I saw one boy, [REDACTED], getting put in there and I never saw him for about a week. He was only nine but he was going mental. He really kicked off when he did. I only saw this room when I was getting warned by the staff not to try running away.

Abuse at Howdenhall

50. If you did anything deemed to be wrong, like making too much noise or if you were having an argument, the staff punished you. They punched you on the arm or leg to give you a 'dead arm' or 'dead leg'. Most of the staff did that but I remember **GOB** and Mr **GPX** doing it quite often. They did it to me and I saw them doing it to other boys. It happened maybe once or twice a week.
51. I just wanted to get out of there. I knew I wasn't going to be going home when I left. I didn't know how long I was going to be in there for and nobody told me what was happening. I asked the staff lots of times how long was I going to be there for and they just kept telling me that I needed to be assessed. I am not aware that I ever was assessed.

Reporting of abuse at Howdenhall

52. There was no one there that I could trust to tell anyone what was going on in there.

Leaving Howdenhall

53. I more or less knew that the only way I would be leaving Howdenhall would be to go to either Wellington List D school or St Joseph's in Tranent. I hoped that it was going to be St Joseph's because I had heard some not very nice stories from some of the boys about Wellington.
54. I can't actually remember going from Howdenhall to St Joseph's or what the circumstances were of me leaving. I can't even remember who told me I was leaving. There wasn't a children's panel or anything like that. I would have been twelve when I left Howdenhall.

St Joseph's, Tranent

55. St Joseph's was a massive building with a massive playing field and an enormous climbing frame. There were other outbuildings. When I went there it was all boys. The age range was from eleven up to sixteen and there were about fifty boys altogether. The boys were split up into houses. The older boys were in Sinclair house. I was in the house with the younger boys but I can't remember the name of it.
56. I was in a dorm with about ten boys. We were all about the same age. All that was in there was a bed and set of drawers beside it.
57. The home was run by the De La Salle Brothers. There was Brother ^{MBU}, Brother ^{zMBP} and Brother ^{MJG}. The staff I remember were Mrs Mulgrew who was in charge. Other staff were ^{LUZ} and Mr McKinnon. A Mr ^{zGBD} came at some point and his friend a Mr McCormack. There was a ^{LVI} and an ^{LVH}. I think they were related and a night watchman called Bob.

Routine at St Joseph's

First day

58. I remember my first impressions when I got to St Joseph's. It was a scary place. I was in the building and I was given the clothes that I was to wear by the matron and I saw the in-house doctor. I met LUZ [REDACTED] and he took me to the room upstairs where I was going to be sleeping. He told me to change into the clothes. I started to get undressed but I was feeling uncomfortable by the way that he was looking at me. I got down to my Y-fronts and I asked him to look away. He refused and he came over and slapped my bare leg on my thigh once. I was shocked and it made me wonder what I had come to. I quickly got dressed.
59. After that I went to see Mrs Wellwood a teacher. I was sat down and she did an aptitude test with me. I was told that I was quite clever, but to be honest there were boys in there that couldn't even write their own name.

Mornings and bedtime

60. We got up about half past seven or eight o'clock when a member of staff would open the door and tell us it was time to get up. We got washed and dressed then went down for breakfast. After breakfast I might help Mrs Mulgrew wash the dishes then get ready for school. We all lined up on the square before we went to classes or sometimes we went into the assembly hall.
61. At night time the night watchman told us when it was time for us to go to our beds and all the other staff left. The lights out time was about ten o'clock.

Mealtimes/Food

62. Mrs Mulgrew did the cooking. I can't remember much about the food.

Washing/bathing

63. There were a number of communal showers on the wall so there was no privacy. We showered every day, usually after recreation, before we went to bed. A member of staff would often come and wander round the shower area probably just to make sure we were behaving. I remember LUZ [REDACTED] and other staff coming in and they told us to wash behind our ears. Looking back this could have been so we took our hands away from our private parts.

Clothing/uniform

64. It was like a uniform that we wore. We were given jeans, socks, pants and polo shirts which were all the same colour. It was all a dirty blue I think and it was all dark. All our clothes were numbered. I was number [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. My own casual clothes which I arrived with were put in a cupboard. I would get them back to wear if I was going home for the weekend.

Leisure time

65. After dinner we had a couple of hours of recreation maybe between six and eight pm. There was a choice of things we could do with different staff. They took it in turns. There was Brother Ben, Mr LVI [REDACTED], Mr HKN [REDACTED] and a guy called Tosh. Sometimes we would go into the gym and play a game called 'murder in the dark' and all the black training shoes would be thrown about. The lights would go off and the challenge was to find the most black gym shoes. We then got ready for our beds and sat about watching the TV.
66. There were no toys, games or books for us to read. There was a pool table. Most of the time we just watched the TV. I used to go home most weekends. If I didn't go home I just mucked about in the place. Quite often I would just about be the only boy left there. I got fed as normal at the weekends.

67. I can't remember any organised games of football but there must have been because one time we played against Wellington school.

Trips and holidays

68. Mr ^{GFJ} took us out on day trips to the beach. I also went on a camping trip and twice I went on skiing trips to Aviemore. Mr Robertson or Robson, I am not sure about his surname, took us on these week long skiing trips. I have no idea who paid for these trips and you only got to go if you had been well behaved.

Schooling

69. In the morning Mr Rutherford the head-teacher spoke to us all at assembly where at the end he would say a prayer then we went to our classes. We went back to the dinner hall for our lunch. We all went to and stayed in the same class but there wasn't much teaching. There were boys in the class that couldn't read or write and we were all treated the same. The only education I got had been from Kelso primary because I was good at my subjects when I was there. It definitely wasn't from Howdenhall or from St Joseph's. There was one boy called who was quite brainy and the teachers just concentrated on getting him through his exams. They didn't bother about the rest of us. I can't even remember what subjects I was taught. I never sat any exams and didn't leave with any qualifications. I cannot even comment on the quality of education. It was just missing.

Healthcare

70. There was an Irish woman, whose name I can't remember, who looked after us. I am not aware if she was a qualified nurse or not. She dealt with our minor cuts and bruises. We also had to see her when we needed new training shoes and she got them for us. If anyone was more seriously injured I presume they would go to the hospital. I was in the hospital once with anaemia. I don't remember seeing a dentist.

Religious instruction

71. The Brothers walked about wearing their cloaks and we had to say Grace before meals. That was about it. There was a chapel there but you were never forced to go. It was your choice if you went. I don't know what the religion was of any of the other boys. I was in St Joseph's when my grandmother died. Brother MJG told me. She had been in hospital after a stroke so I knew she was seriously ill. He took me aside and he told me the news in a compassionate way. He subsequently took me to the funeral service at the crematorium.

Work

72. After breakfast I would usually give Mrs Mulgrew a hand to wash the dishes. Other chores we had to do was clean the toilets, sinks and showers.

Birthdays and Christmas

73. I went home for Christmas but I remember there being decorations at St Joseph's. I can't remember if they ever recognised your birthday by way of a cake or birthday cards.

Personal possessions

74. I never really had any personal possessions. If you were good the Irish nurse who also got you shoes would get you a decent pair of trainers. I don't really remember having anything else. I didn't have a radio or anything like that.

Bed Wetting

75. I am not sure if any of the boys wet their beds so I don't know how the staff dealt with it.

Visitors

76. I went home most weekends so I never got any visitors at any time when I was at St Joseph's. I never got any visits from any social worker or anyone else who came to check on how I was or to tell me what was happening. I knew from fairly early on that I was going to be there until it was time for me to leave care. I am not aware of any official inspection into the actual way St Joseph's was being run.

Weekend leave

77. At the weekends I got the bus from Tranent to Edinburgh then the bus from Edinburgh to Kelso. It took about three hours. I travelled on my own. A lot of the time when I got home my dad wasn't even there because he was staying at his girlfriends. He left food for me but often I never saw him. Sometimes my sister was there. I never told them at St Joseph's that my dad wasn't there so they wouldn't have known I was going home to an empty house.

Running away

78. I ran away a couple of times. I got in with a bad crowd and went with them. I did it to get away from the place for a while. Both times four or five of us ran away and we went to Edinburgh. By two or three o'clock in the morning it was getting too cold so we handed ourselves in to the police and we got taken back to St Joseph's. We weren't punished apart from I probably didn't get to go home that weekend. No one asked us why we had ran away.

Discipline

79. The main punishment you would get as a form of discipline would be not allowing you to go home for the weekend. Running away or fighting might result in not going home. I don't remember there being any corporal punishment.

Abuse at St Joseph's

80. At St Joseph's they would bend your fingers back or punch you on the arm or leg to give you a dead arm or dead leg. Most of the staff would do this to you but the ones I particularly remember were LVI and Mr HKN. The old Mr LVH would pull the hair at the side of your ears. They would do these sorts of things if you were too loud or laughing or running away from them if they were trying to get a hold of you for some reason. It might not even be something bad but something that annoyed them. If you had done something and were running away from Mr ZGBD he would kick his wooden clog off his foot and try and hit you with it. Others would throw their sets of keys at you. It was sore for a wee while if the keys hit you.
81. Several members of staff told you that you weren't allowed to wear underwear in bed. They said it made your testicles sweat and stop you from ejaculating when we were older. The staff who told us this were LUY who taught us gym, Mr LUZ and the night watchman.
82. Some evenings Brother Ben would hold a music class which you could choose to go to. He used to put about five or six boys in a circle holding each other's hands then he wound up this machine and it would slowly give you an electric shock. The faster he wound the handle the more of a shock you got. It was sore along your arms and you couldn't let go. He wouldn't let you out of his class until you had held hands and got the electric treatment. These classes probably happened once every week. After the electric shock your arms felt strange.
83. When I was fifteen I got the job of helping in the boiler-house. I was looking after the water tanks. The LVI and Mr HKN worked in there. One day they grabbed me and tied my arms up then put a pipe inside my clothing and poured some liquid in. It was like cold oil or something like that. They kept saying that they were just having a laugh and it was an initiation to the boiler-house. This went on for a couple of hours. LVH came in and he went daft at them and told them to untie me. I went in and had a shower but it was impossible to get this stuff off. It was

waterproof and it was like oil. I had several showers then baths and you could see the oil sitting on the top of the water.

84. Brother **MBU** used to give the boys that came back on the Sunday night chewy sweets to eat but he also handed out tobacco and cigarettes. Boys were as young as fourteen and he was giving it to them. That is when I was introduced to smoking. When I was in hospital with anaemia Brother **MJG** used to bring me in cigarettes. Looking back it is just so wrong.

Reporting of abuse at St Joseph's

85. I never told anyone what was going on at St Joseph's. To be honest there was no one I could have reported it to. I thought it was all just part of being in there. I assumed Mr **LVH** may have done something about the boiler-house incident because he saw what happened but I don't think he did.

Leaving St Joseph's

86. I was at St Josephs for about two and a half years and I left **1987** when I was fifteen. Because my birthday was in **1987** I knew that I would be a **1987** leaver. I was still fifteen when I left

Preparation for leaving

87. No one ever sat down with me and talked about my career choices. It was very much the case of 'That's it, you are old enough to leave, see you later'. I knew for a long time that I would be leaving **1987** There was no preparation for me leaving.

Life after being in care

88. When I left St Joseph's I went back to live with my dad. I didn't go back to school. I stayed in my dad's house until I was eighteen. When I was eighteen my dad got re-married and I got put out the house. I was rarely unemployed because I was good at going into work sites and asking for jobs. I blagged my way a bit but it worked. I was more or less a jack of all trades.
89. When I was 21 I went to college to become a plumber but I got a girl pregnant so had to drop out. I have done quite a few other jobs. A lot of people haven't liked the way that I work because I am a grafter. I work too hard and show them up. I subsequently married and have one son. My wife has passed away.

Impact

90. I lost out on a proper education because no one was interested in teaching me. I have no doubts that I would have been a different person, had different jobs and been more successful if I had a better education. I wasn't prepared for life after care either. No one taught me how to properly live and care for myself. I have always felt, and still feel, different from everybody else.
91. Because I was in care homes and had very little contact with girls this affected my ability to relate to them when I was older. In general I think I always want to be over nice to people and sometimes this puts people off. I know now that there has to be a balance between giving and taking in a relationship. When I have been in some relationships it has put some women off because I have obsessively cleaned things and I am too tidy. I still have difficulty relating to women.
92. I can no longer work beside others because of my cleanliness and tidiness and that is the reason I am now self-employed. No one can handle working closely with me. I

put this down to my time in Howdenhall and then St Joseph's when I was made to do lots of cleaning.

93. When I was at St Joseph's I got involved in illegal drugs. It happened by chance when I was on a bus when I was home for the weekend. I got speaking to some boys on a bus and it just happened. I started taking drugs. I still take drugs to this day but not as much as I used to. I saw it a bit like I was self-harming myself.
94. I am very protective of my son and I always want the best for him. My dad never did that for me and he generally wasn't a big part in my life.
95. A couple of partners have told me that I watch too much TV. They say that I expect people to behave like the actors do on the television and have perfect lives. I think everything should be good all the time, but that's not how it works. I never had a role model or someone to look up to or even a father figure to copy when I was growing up.
96. I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression about four years ago. There wasn't anything in particular that was happening at the time. I had been going to the doctor's on and off for years after I left St Joseph's and things were just building up. I don't really think about my time in care very much now. It does come into my mind sometimes but I try and just push it away and get on with my life.

Treatment/support

97. I had a community psychiatric nurse for a while. I didn't find him to be of any use. When I was speaking to him my life as a child was never really discussed. I have not seen anyone from the mental health profession for a couple of years now. I am on medication for my anxiety and depression but my dose is now very low.

Reporting of Abuse

98. I have never reported anything that happened to me in care to anybody. I have never discussed it with my community psychiatric nurse either. I just thought it was all part of growing up. After I left St Joseph's no one from the social work department ever contacted me to ask how I was getting on or even to let me know that I was no longer under their care.

Records

99. I have never tried to get my records from my time in care. I am not sure if I want to see what has been written about me and I don't know what this would prove.

Lessons to be Learned

100. Children are not treated as individuals or young people when they are put in care. They don't have a voice and just have to tread water there until their time is up and they are put out. Children must be given a proper education and encouraged by whatever means to get what they want or be what they want to be. They should be better prepared for life after care.
101. I hope that it never goes back to the way it was when I was in care. There should be more checks on the children to make sure they are being treated properly and that they are happy.

Other information

102. 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.

LVC

Signed



Dated

2/6/21