

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GOP

Support person present: No

1. My name is GOP. My date of birth is 1978. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Blackburn Lancashire where my mum's family stayed at the time. My mum's name is and my dad was. He died in a car crash alongside his brother in 1985 when I was six years old. My older brother is called who was born in 1977. My sisters are who is three years younger than me and who was born in 1984. I also have a step-sister called who is my dad's daughter but to a different mother. Her mother's surname was.
3. We moved to Drumchapel, Glasgow when I was young but after my dad died my mum took us back to Blackburn to be nearer her parents who ran a pub there. I still remember the police coming to our door to tell my mum that dad had died and her screaming. Mum never remarried after dad died.
4. When we moved back to Blackburn life was actually quite good but I didn't like school. I was never a fan of schools but my sister and I were the only white children in the school and they also tried to teach us about Islam. In addition the school used the cane and, because of all this, I was taken out of the school. I was about seven years old.

5. We moved back to Drumchapel but I became disruptive. My mum always said that I took my dad's death really badly and I don't recall getting any counselling for it. By the time I was nine years old I was considered a danger to myself. I was also making life difficult for my mum as she had to keep on two jobs to make ends meet but I kept running away from school while she was at work. Counsellors said I was overly concerned about losing a second parent.

6. I was sent to Rosevale Primary School in Milton which I travelled to by taxi each day but I would often get out of the taxi but not go into the school. One day I walked to Lambhill where I spoke to an elderly couple who let me play with their children in the back yard. A short while later police officers arrived and then social workers got further involved in my life. The only social worker whose name I recall was Claire Twigg.

7. A meeting was held between a doctor, social workers and my mum. According to my mum they said that there was nothing they could do about it and that I would grow out of it. Thereafter I was regularly attending children's panels at Anderston in Glasgow and I'm told that when they would ask me questions and I would just ignore them.

8. One day I was taken to Ballikinrain Children's Home by my mum and a social worker. I thought we were just visiting and while we were looking round I was told that it was to be a new school for me and that I would be living there. I thought that that was something that would happen in the future but when my mum and the social worker went to leave they left me behind and said that I was staying at the school from then onwards. I was scared and crying. It was about a week later that the staff told me what was happening and, at that time, I thought I would be there for six months to a year.

9. Growing up I blamed my mum for me having to go to that school but, as I got older, I realised how hard it must have been for her. She was a single mum having to work two jobs to keep the family going after my dad died but I was stealing sweets and starting small fires and people wouldn't baby-sit us if I was in the house. I was out of control and causing her so much trouble.

Ballikinrain Children's Home, near Killearn, Stirlingshire

10. Ballikinrain was out in the country near Killearn. It was a big old castle with a gate house and a drive that went on for about half a mile. It was surrounded by trees and in the middle of nowhere. The place had three floors and there were two units within it called the Top and Bottom units. The Bottom unit was for kids my age, I was nine, while the Top unit was for the older kids. The place was locked up but there were no walls surrounding it. There were out-buildings where the classes were.
11. We slept in dorms with about two to five beds in each and there were thirty boys in the home aged between seven and sixteen or seventeen. The units were on the top and bottom floors and in between was a floor that had a dining room, a kitchen, assembly hall and rooms that had a pool table, a snooker table and some computers. There was also a living room for each unit.
12. The SNR [REDACTED] was called Mr KKM [REDACTED] and SNR [REDACTED] was called IKE [REDACTED] something or other. GOJ [REDACTED] was an ex-prison officer and was in charge of the unit I was in. There was a janitor called Eddie. In our unit there were four or five staff. My key worker throughout my time there was called Irene. Other staff I recall were GOQ [REDACTED] who was the music teacher, HXA [REDACTED] who was the science teacher, GRT [REDACTED] the English teacher, IIN [REDACTED] who was the math's teacher and HXB [REDACTED] who taught P.E. Other teachers were GOZ [REDACTED], Greig, Mr HHZ [REDACTED] and one called GOS [REDACTED] who only ever seemed to do word puzzles.
13. The place was run by the Church of Scotland but I don't know who funded me being there. Probably because I thought I was just visiting the place when I first went there the only things I had when I arrived were the clothes I was wearing.

Routine at Ballikinrain

14. We would get up at about 7:30/8:00 am when we would go for a shower and a member of staff would put some shampoo in our hands to wash with. They would also put a small amount of toothpaste on our toothbrushes. There was no privacy when having showers and even though we were all boys there was quite a range in our ages.
15. After showering we would get dressed and go for breakfast. After that we would gather in the assembly room where the headmaster would tell us where we were going that day. The school was split into R2, B1 and B2 and teachers would be standing round the room and we would be told at assembly where we would be going for the day.
16. We would stop for lunch then go back to school then it would be dinner followed by leisure time when we could watch the TV or play games. Bedtime was about 8:30 pm but if anybody had misbehaved, like speaking at lunchtime, we would all have to go to bed five minutes earlier. A second discretion meant it would be ten minutes earlier and three meant fifteen minutes earlier and so on. **GOU** would announce these penalties by shouting "one", "two" etc. You would get tea, toast and an orange for supper.
17. Most of us would go home at the weekend when we would be dropped off by the school bus at Port Dundas in Glasgow on a Friday night and you had to report back there on a Monday morning to catch the same bus back to the school. I had to make my own way from Drumchapel to Port Dundas. If you were late you would get punished because you then had to make your own way back to the school.

Mealtimes/Food

18. The food was good and after each meal a member of staff would examine your table. If it was tidy then those at the table could get extra food. I don't recall anybody having a problem with the food.

Washing/bathing

19. The washing procedure was that we had a shower every morning.

Clothing/uniform

20. We had our own clothes which we would change at the weekend when we went home though I think some of our clothes were washed when we were home at the weekend. We kept our clothes in a wee cupboard. A couple of times a year we were given a grant for clothes and staff would take us to buy new clothes in Clydebank and our names would be put on them when we got back to the school.

Leisure time

21. We could play pool or snooker or watch the TV. We also went on walks or would go out in the school van with a member of staff.

Trips and holidays

22. If you didn't get home at the weekend you were taken to places like Loch Lomond, Callander and Aberfoyle where we would do outdoor activities like rock-climbing, cycling or canoeing. A teacher called Greig was experienced in that sort of thing. Some of the kids were also taken to France to do scuba diving but not me as I couldn't swim.

Schooling

23. The science class was alright because the teacher, **HXA** made it interesting. However, reading and writing didn't register with me. There were meetings now and again about that, where staff would say that I could do better but nothing ever changed. Some of the teachers were alright but **GRT**, the English teacher, was always stinking of booze.

Healthcare

24. Some of the staff had first-aid knowledge but we didn't have any nurses among the staff. One time I stood on a rusty nail and GOQ, the music teacher, just pulled the nail out. I had a limp for about a year after that and there was an occasion when we were out walking and GOQ was complaining about me not keeping up, That was because I had a limp and it had been him who pulled the nail out in the first place. I don't recall ever going to see a doctor or a dentist.

Religious instruction

25. Although the school was run by the Church of Scotland religion wasn't a big thing at the school. We did have to go to church on a Friday evening where we would have to sing a few hymns but that was it. There were no prayers before meals or at bedtime or anything like that.

Birthdays and Christmas

26. There was a big party at Christmas when locals would donate things like cakes and biscuits for us. Thereafter most of us would go home for Christmas. The only thing I remember about my birthdays was Liz, a member of staff, giving me a card with £2 in it one time.

Personal possessions

27. I had nothing in the way of personal possessions. I only had the clothes I arrived in and never did have any toys or things like that. The only thing we had was a wee plastic box where our clothes were kept.

Bed Wetting

28. I wet the bed sometimes. When that happened you just told the staff that you had wet the bed and you would get fresh bedding. You were never punished for it and there was never a sense of being humiliated because you had done so. I don't remember any efforts made to help us stop wetting the bed.

Visitors

29. You could get visits but since most of us would go home at the weekend there probably wasn't any great need for relatives to visit. I remember my brother visited once but it was only because he was working for a company that happened to be delivering to the school and he was only there for about ten minutes.
30. Social workers would come on pre-arranged dates and would bring my mum with them. We would then all sit in a room and discuss my progress, behaviour and schooling. I didn't get to speak at these meetings but I was present. They would tell me that I had to behave and learn more. Looking back I was probably a bit of a brat.

External Inspections

31. If there were any outside inspectors who came to look at the school then I wasn't aware of them.

Discipline

32. In the school teachers dealt with trouble themselves by shouting at us or moving our seats. The teacher we called 'GOS [REDACTED]' would twist your wrist if you misbehaved. This was supposed to keep us in check but it never did.

Running away

33. I ran away the first week I was there. Running away was easy but you had to keep to the fields and not walk on the roads or you would be caught straightaway. I first ran away because I just didn't want to be there. I ran away a few times and usually by myself. I think the closest I got to getting home was Milngavie. As often as not staff would catch us. When they did they would take you to a nearby police office which was probably done to scare us.
34. In the police office we would be put in a detention cell until a social worker came to pick us up and take us back to the home. Similarly, if you got picked up by the police when you were at home for the weekend, staff would pick you up from the police station and you wouldn't be allowed home the following week. Quite often a member of staff, especially **GOU**, would give you a backhander across the face and shout at you.

Abuse at Ballikinrain, near Killearn, Stirlingshire

35. If you were late back after going home at the weekend you would be punished the next day in the living room in front of everybody. **GOU** would tell you to strip down to your vest and underpants and you would have to stand like that for hours, sometimes being told to face the corner. It was humiliating and was usually done after we finished school at 5:00 pm.
36. Staff would supply us with fags, nail varnish, typex remover and glue, things that we could sniff and the attitude seemed to be that we were easier to control if we were under the influence of such things. When we were out with staff for a walk or a trip they would often give us a beer. **GPB** and **ITK** were two staff members that I recall giving us those things.

37. Sometimes some of the boys would argue and ask the staff to arrange a fight between them. Some of the staff would then organise a fight between the boys involved in the gym and whoever won, won.
38. If you were bad during the day it was usually dealt with there and then. You would be shouted at or slapped in the face especially from GOU [REDACTED]. Sometimes staff used what they called restraining moves on us which I didn't understand as we were only kids and were no match for them. There was an occasion where the member of staff called GOZ [REDACTED] threw me through a door and I ran off. I didn't get far and he shouted at me.
39. At the weekend all those who didn't get home were kept in the same unit and the older boys would sexually abuse the younger ones. Two of the of the older boys, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], shat on the face of one of the younger boys, [REDACTED]. Others would get the younger boys to masturbate them. [REDACTED] was one who was in the lower unit with us. He was from Pollok and we used to buzz nail varnish together. I don't know if he sexually abused anybody in the home but he was a convicted sex offender in later life.
40. One older boy, who was heavily built with ginger hair, was called [REDACTED]. He would masturbate in front of the younger boys at the weekend. I was never sexually abused but I was scared on those weekends when I didn't get home. Another one called [REDACTED] would tie younger kids to a tree and leave them there for hours. Members of staff seemed to find this funny.
41. While I was in Ballikinrain a couple of the boys died. [REDACTED] was twelve or thirteen and died after sniffing [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] from Paisley hanged himself while on home leave after rumours went around that he had had sex with a dog. Two other boys died when running away in the snow but I don't know their names.

Leaving Ballikinrain

42. I was told that when I turned sixteen I could ask to go to an emergency panel and request being taken off supervision so I made the application. I appeared in front of a panel and I promised to behave and they let me go and I went straight home from the panel to Drumchapel. Two of those on the panel thought I should stay where I was but the main guy on the panel said I could go home. They told me if I didn't behave I would end up in jail. I was sixteen.

Life after being in care

43. After I returned home I started getting into trouble stealing cars. I was seventeen when I first got done and got probation. When I was eighteen I got charged with kidnapping and got a five year sentence. Not long after I finished that sentence I got a six year sentence for armed robbery and my next sentence, eighteen months later, was for six years with a three year extension for attempted robbery. I have been in prison most of my adult life and am presently serving a sentence which is due to expire in December 2024 though I can ask to get out every December.
44. The only girlfriend I had was for a few years when I was about twenty and I was with that girl for about four years. We didn't have any children.

Impact

45. It's difficult for me to say what sort of impact being in Ballikinrain for so long has had on my life because I have nothing else to compare it with. I have been in prison most of my adult life and haven't known anything else. It's possible that if I had received counselling after my dad died then maybe I could have avoided going into care but I'm not sure. I hadn't wanted to go into Ballikinrain but I didn't get a say in the matter.

46. I don't think that Ballikinrain taught me anything other than teaching me how to be streetwise. It gave me no education and, in fact, I have had no education throughout my life. I taught myself how to read and write while in prison. I would say that primary 4 or 5 was the last time I was at school properly. I think I was put into Ballikinrain to learn life the hard way.
47. I regret not having an education because that's how people get on in life and I don't think I would be sitting in prison if I had been better educated. I've been on methadone for 22 years but can't get off it. That all started when I was in Ballikinrain and started smoking cannabis and sniffing solvents and soon that wasn't strong enough and I moved on to harder drugs. My time there also led to my life of crime and started with me shoplifting along with others in nearby towns or on the Monday morning before we caught the bus at Port Dundas.
48. Sometimes, when I went home at the weekends, I used to wonder if that was my real family. I felt as if I brought myself up when I was young and going back to Ballikinrain every Monday was normal to me but it made me feel separate from the rest of my family. There were times my mum and I fell out but, even to this day, she will say "let **GOP** get what he wants".
49. My brother and sisters all went right through school and are all employed. I've never had a proper job in my life. I remember when I went home from Ballikinrain at the weekends my sister used to be worried about me going back and my brother used to be jealous of the fact that mum spoiled me a bit when I was at home which usually led to the normal sibling rivalry between us. When I'm out of prison I usually contact my younger sister.
50. I would love to do something with my life but I'm getting too old to get into education and even if I did people simply won't employ me when they hear I'm on methadone and that is a direct impact from my time in Ballikinrain.

Treatment/support

51. I have never received any treatment or support in connection with the time I spent in care and I don't think prison is the sort of place where you should seek such help. I don't think there is any support in prison for us and I hate social workers because I feel they just wreck homes. I do think back sometimes about my time in care but when you're in prison you don't want to think about such things too much. I do get night terrors sometimes and my neighbour once thought he had a psycho next door because I was apparently screaming in my sleep.

Reporting of Abuse

52. I have never reported anything that happened to me in Ballikinrain to the police or anybody in a position of authority. I never saw the point as I wouldn't have been believed. I used to tell my mum what was going on but she would just tell me that I still had to go back every week. I know that she was sometimes angry with social workers but I don't know if it was because of the way I was being treated but certainly nothing changed.

Records

53. I have never thought about getting my records concerning my time in care but it would be interesting to see what such records had to say about both my time in Ballikinrain and what involvement social workers had in the decisions made on my life when I was a child.

Lessons to be Learned

54. I know that things will have changed in how children are dealt with and I suspect that people are getting it right these days. As such I'm not sure what I could say that would

contribute to how things could be improved. What would have helped me and others would have been if people who had gone through care themselves had been involved and been there for us to speak to. Those sort of people would have had a better understanding of what children like me had been going through.

55. I would like to see changes in how social workers operate but I doubt they will ever change. I feel that they create reasons to justify what they do but they wreck homes and families. I feel that they prevented me getting the proper education or the proper guidance for the things that I was going through as a child.

Hopes for The Inquiry

56. I just want to see things being better for children who are struggling at home. I would like to see them receive the proper help they need as opposed to their cases just being pushed under the carpet. Too many people end up in prison simply because they were abused as children or come from broken homes and they don't get the support they need.
57. 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.. GOP

Dated..... 13 APRIL 2022