

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Deirdre Mairi MACDONALD

Support person present: No

1. My name is Deirdre Macdonald. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1955. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. My father was a minister in the Church of Scotland. I was born in Stornoway. We lived there until moving to Inch in Aberdeenshire when I was twelve. I went to Inverurie Academy. I decided that I wanted to leave school after fifth year. In the course of that year, I studied like I've never studied before or since and gained access to university. I went to Aberdeen University to study for a general arts degree, sociology, psychology and English language. I lasted a year there. They wouldn't let me pass the exams.
3. My favourite thing growing up was a church youth group. There were inspiring people who got us to put together shows. They were involved in youth work and education. We put on slightly irreverent shows about what it was like to be a young person, using poetry and song. That was probably the most important part of my teenage years, meeting people who gave you respect and recognition, that you may only be fifteen but you were worth listening to. That was the background to me ending up doing what I did in the summer after fifth year.
4. Somebody must have suggested an organisation called Community Service Volunteers to me. They were based in London. They would find a placement for people who wanted to do voluntary work. In order to find the most appropriate place for me, I

attended an interview in May 1972. I got a sleeper to London. It was very exciting. I remember buying a book at the railway station about children's rights. There were a lot of things about looking at life through the eyes of young people at the time.

5. I was sent details of where I was to go and when they would be expecting me. They put me in what they decided was the most appropriate placement for me. Having grown up in a rural Church of Scotland manse, they sent me to a Church of Scotland run list D school for girls in Port Glasgow. With hindsight, it must have been the fact that it was run by the Church of Scotland that caused them to send me there. My impression of the gap in time between my interview and my going to Port Glasgow was the time taken to find a placement. I don't think any vetting was carried out.

Langlands Park List D School, Port Glasgow

6. A few weeks after the interview in London, I started work at Langlands Park. I was there from June till the end of September, beginning of October 1972. It was a residential school so I moved into the school as part of the job. I can't remember how many girls there were. When I arrived, I met SNR [REDACTED], who I think was called Mr MSH [REDACTED], and the SNR [REDACTED], Mr LWH [REDACTED].
7. Mr MSH [REDACTED] had been in the army. He was square built and a bit of a thug. SNR [REDACTED] was a former PE teacher. He was tanned and more good looking than Mr MSH [REDACTED]. He was a more acceptable face. There was a handful of other staff, who were all women. There was also an older member of staff who sticks in my mind. She was quite a sweet lady with her hair up in a bun. She often kept me right.
8. I wasn't seventeen until [REDACTED] of that year. The age group of the girls was twelve to eighteen. That was another reason why I shouldn't have been put there. I think the oldest girls must have been fifteen going on sixteen because I don't remember anybody being older than me. Langlands Park was a big old house. I was given a bedroom of my own. It was a little room half way between the residential side, where all the girls slept, and the dining room, kitchen and staff area. There was a PE student

from Jordanhill who was there on placement. She shared my room for a while. I was a pair of hands and a pair of ears. I wasn't given any induction or any training whilst I was there.

9. I was a volunteer, but I got paid enough to buy twenty Number Six cigarettes a week. I forged really good friendships with a lot of the girls. They discovered that I was happy for them to come to my room. The girls told me all their stories about their families and their lives. They taught me all the Glasgow street songs. I'll never forget them. I remember writing in my diary, "There but for the grace of God goes me." As far as I could see, they were just a product of their upbringing, as much as I was.

Routine at Langlands Park

Mornings and bedtime

10. The girls slept in big rooms. There was more than one person in each room. The staff took it in turns to stay in the girls' area at night. I never had to do that. The staff would wake the girls in the morning. During term time, the girls had breakfast and went out to the classroom.

Mealtimes/Food

11. Everybody ate together. I would sit with the staff. The food was fine. It was home cooked. I remember the scones were good. I don't remember there being any issues with girls not liking the food. I had become quite skinny at the time so I wasn't into eating huge amounts myself.

School

12. There was a portacabin outside where the girls had their school lessons. I seem to remember they skirted on subjects. I assisted the teacher. I would look at the girls' work and help them with it. I remember very little of the school.

Religion

13. Langlands Park was funded by the Church of Scotland, but I don't remember any worship taking place. There may have been visits by the local minister.

Leisure time

14. After teatime, the girls would make their way to my room. The fact that I shared my twenty Number Six with them was a draw. I spent time with the girls in their part of the house. It must've gone on for a while because I remember lots about them being in my room. The staff would ask me to be like a spy and tell them what the girls confided in me. I never did. They told me in confidence and I didn't want to spoil the relationship I had with them. I thought the conversations they had with me might be helpful for them.
15. It came to Mr MSH notice that the girls were coming into my room and he took me aside one day. He said it must be a nuisance for me so they had been told not to visit me in my room, for my peace of mind. I wasn't in a position to say that it was okay.
16. Some of the girls would get a pass at the weekend to go home, if it was deemed to be appropriate. It depended on their behaviour. I think the school might have organised transport for them. I seem to remember one of the girls, sometimes being on her own at the weekend.

Trips/holidays

17. Different groups of girls were taken on a camping holiday in the summer, but I don't remember any other outings during term time. We went to the Trossachs with about half a dozen girls. I seem to remember that only one of the male staff was there. I think that enabled the other to have his family holiday at the same time. Mr MSH and Mr LWH were quite experienced with outdoor activities, given their backgrounds.

18. We were there for five days. To me, it was all really exciting. We did water skiing and kayaking. The activities were organised by the staff. We cooked our own food. I have a photo of me peeling the tatties. The only problem I remember was getting the girls up in the morning and getting them motivated. They weren't really that interested in doing any of the activities. Unless they were allowed to go home, the camping trip was the only time they were allowed out of Langlands Park.

Healthcare

19. I think there was a member of staff who had a nursing role. She helped the girls with their periods and things like that. They would have gone out to Port Glasgow for medical appointments.

Visits

20. There were never any family visits. I think there was liaison between staff at Langlands Park and the local authority. The girls would be removed during the day by one of the male members of staff. I remember being curious about that. That may have been when they met with social workers to discuss their situations. I think the girls had key workers within Langlands Park. I remember there was one woman who was a mature student, studying social work. She was there doing a placement. I can't remember there being any social work visits.

Bed Wetting

21. There was one girl in particular who was a bit different from all the others. She was the only one who wasn't from Glasgow. She came from Stranraer. She was thirteen and I think her name was [REDACTED]. She was tall and gangly. I can't remember what I was told about the girl's backgrounds, but I do remember something about her that one of the staff must've told me. I was told that her mum had been pimping her at Stranraer harbour. She was very highly strung. I think she wet the bed.

22. A girl who wet the bed would've been made to feel ashamed for what she'd done. I don't remember having a sense of the kind of insight and therapeutic approach to caring for the girls that I would expect nowadays. It was more a culture of blame. It would be verbal from any of the staff. I think there was an atmosphere of fear amongst the staff because of how the two men [REDACTED]. I think the staff would have acted because it would be expected for them to act and behave in a certain way by the two male members of staff. I remember a lot of shouting from Mr [MSH] and Mr [LWH].

Running away

23. Langlands Park must've been closed in some sense. In order for the girls to make a getaway, they had to climb over quite a high wall into the cemetery next door. There were two girls who ran away as often as they could. They would go over the wall to the cemetery and run off. I think there was a fire exit they used. They were probably away for a matter of hours. The police would be sent to pick them up. All they ever did was run home and meet up with their mates in Bridgeton. They would try and hide at pals' houses. I suppose I was slightly in awe of their audacity, to be doing that.

Abuse at Langlands Park

24. I remember the two girls who ran away a lot being brought back by the police. That evening, there had been a lot of talk and anxiety amongst the staff about whether the girls were safe. When they were brought back, things calmed down a bit and I went to my room. I couldn't settle in my room because of what I heard through the walls. I heard something that made me come out of my room.
25. I went along to where the girls were being disciplined for having absconded. I think they were with both the male members of staff in a kitchen area which had stainless steel units in it. I recall that I could hear both girls being beaten up. It seemed to last for ages, but whether that's a distortion of memory I don't know.

26. I remember the older member of staff consoling me because I was really upset. I remember she was quite upset too. We were absolutely unable to do anything. There was no female member of staff in the room where the girls were with the men. I think hands and fists were used. I remember seeing the bruises the next day. There were bruises on their upper bodies. There were visible marks on their faces as well, cuts and bruises. I think the girls weren't around for a couple of days.
27. There was nothing that ever made me think there was any sexual abuse at Langlands Park. It was physical abuse. It was a leathering. I only remember those two girls running away on that one occasion whilst I was there. I do remember the older member of staff indicating to me that it was normal for them to be dealt with in this way when they were picked up after running away. I think it was what was expected. It's because of the blows that I heard being inflicted that I got in touch with the Inquiry.

Reporting of abuse at Langlands Park

28. I don't know whether anything was said or done by the other staff or whether the physical abuse was ever recorded by any of the staff. I wasn't privy to any record keeping. I would doubt whether the staff would be able to voice their opinion about what Mr ^{MSH} and Mr ^{LWH} were doing. I do remember an atmosphere of fear. When Mr ^{MSH} was being nice, he would make you squirm and want to throw up. I think he felt that he yielded a lot of power. I do remember getting the sense that I shouldn't speak about what had happened at the school.
29. At that time, my dad was on a committee for the Church of Scotland. It was called the committee of forty and involved taking stock of where the church was and what its future role would be in communities. It was a strategic committee for the church at the time which reported to the General Assembly once a year. He was attending committee meetings and I remember meeting up with him and telling him about what had happened to the girls who ran away. I also remember having a conversation with him where I asked what was the point in Langlands Park? I raised that with him because I remember thinking that it was no wonder that the girls ran away. Nothing

had changed for them. In terms of liaison with the home environment and what was happening, there was no hope of anything ever changing.

30. I wasn't made aware of any action he might have taken, but my father wasn't the sort of man who would sit on his hands. I knew that telling him might be of benefit to the girls that were there or any girls that might be sent there in the future. I think the place closed the following year. I never asked my father if our conversations had anything to do with that, but I certainly told him that the Church of Scotland should be ashamed of Langlands Park. My dad died in 1998.
31. When I had weekends off, I spent some time with a friend who was a social worker, Anne. She had been a social worker in Aberdeenshire and was one of the people who ran the church youth group I attended as a teenager. She was in Glasgow studying for some kind of postgraduate social work qualification. I've spoken to her recently and she doesn't remember any conversations or concerns I shared at the time, but I would've spoken to her about what I saw at Langlands Park and asked her if it was normal. I would've been very naïve, believing that everybody could become a good person and everybody could be fulfilled, no matter what their background was. I would've been asking Anne if that was the way to go about it.

Final thoughts

32. I left Langlands Park when I was due to start university. The staff thanked me and wished me well. They didn't know I'd keep in touch with some of the girls. I kept in contact with the two girls who were beaten up. I arranged to meet both of them once they had left Langlands Park. We met up in either Glasgow or Aberdeen and I still have a photograph of me with one of them, taken in a photo booth in a train station. I don't remember ever discussing what had happened to them after they ran away. I think that staff told me not to speak about anything that I'd witnessed. We just didn't speak about it. It was horrible.

33. I remember thinking at Langlands Park and on the camping holiday that nothing could possibly change for the girls, given the way it was organised. They were removed from their home situation and then there was whatever happened to them at Langlands Park. They were sentenced to be there. Once their sentence was finished, they'd go back home.
34. I should never have gone to Langlands Park. It was wrong in so many ways. The emphasis was definitely on how well the girls behaved and how compliant they were, rather than anything else. I don't remember having any sense of them being rehabilitated back into their communities. I remember the mixed emotions of leaving. I remember the emotion of feeling I was leaving those girls to that place. I remember to this day one of the girls clinging to me as I left and me having to prise her fingers away.
35. What I witnessed happening to those two girls has never left me. In the course of my work as branch secretary of a local government Unison branch, there was discussion about supporting people, staff and Unison members who might come within the remit of the Inquiry for whatever reason. Two of the senior social work managers that I got to know well through my work at Unison encouraged me to contact the Inquiry. I felt a sense of relief that I could speak to the Inquiry and speak about my experience at Langlands Park. The reason I wanted to come forward to the Inquiry was in case I might corroborate what somebody else is telling the Inquiry.
36. I would love to think that these girls could get an apology for what happened to them and an acknowledgement that it was wrong. I don't know if that's possible. I have an idea of what some young people's experiences are in residential care now. Additionally, I have supported staff in the course of my work who are in children's residential places in Aberdeen. We still have a long way to go.

37. 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..... 14 NOV 18