

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

John HARRISON

Support person present: No

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

Life before going into care

2. Around 1999 or 2000 I officially changed my surname from Harrison McClure to Harrison, [REDACTED]
3. My parents were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My father took his own life on [REDACTED] 1986. He was in the care of Gartloch Mental Hospital at that time. My mother died on [REDACTED] 1981 whilst she was in the Southern General Hospital, Glasgow. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
4. I was 8 years old when my mother died. I had a hatred towards my father. He got re-married to [REDACTED] 6 months after my mother's death. My father didn't get on with my mother's family. I know that my father had a motor bike accident and I don't know if this had an effect on his mental health.
5. It was after my mum died that I first came to the notice of the social work. The social work had never been involved [REDACTED] before this. It might have been because of my father's mental illness. My grandmother, [REDACTED], from my mum's side wanted custody [REDACTED]. At that time the family home was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Cranhill. My gran stayed at number [REDACTED] right above us. When my mother died the family home moved to [REDACTED] Glasgow.

6. My father wouldn't let [REDACTED] granny but she would always turn up at school every Friday at 3 [REDACTED]. It wasn't a legal custody battle, my gran just wanted access to see [REDACTED]. Eventually, my father relented and [REDACTED] able to go and see my gran every Sunday.
7. The difficulties for [REDACTED] me were that my father was in and out of hospital with his mental health issues. After my father committed suicide [REDACTED] went to stay at my gran and grandfather's house.
8. By this time my gran had down-sized so [REDACTED] it was fine. The house was at [REDACTED] Glasgow. As a result of what had happened I think that my legal guardian was the Strathclyde Regional Council social work department. My social worker Liz Reid, who was based at John Street was very good.
9. I was about 14 or 15 when I started staying out late at night and playing truant from school. I was tall and I think I looked older than I was. I was gay and became a rent boy. Looking back now, as an adult, I was mistaking people caring for me and thinking this was good news. I know now that this wasn't the case.
10. When I was 15 I ran away to London. This was when the social work became involved big time. I was found in London and flown back to Glasgow. I was met by two social workers and two police officers. I was then taken to Newfield Assessment Centre.

Newfield Assessment Centre, Johnstone, Renfrewshire

11. I arrived at Newfield having went there straight from the plane. I met [REDACTED] HJZ, the unit manager and I think my key worker. Liz Reid wasn't there but she was still involved as my social worker. They were both very good.

Routine at Newfield Assessment Centre

12. Newfield was very good; it was purpose- built. I was there under the authority of an order. I had to attend a children's hearing straight after I came back from London. I had an STD, a sexually transmitted disease and as a result of this the children's panel put me on a supervision order.
13. I didn't have to wear a uniform. What I was given was a clothing allowance of £177 by the Council.

Mornings and bedtime

14. The normal time for getting up was between seven thirty and eight. It was not a tight regime. It was expected that you made your bed and kept your room tidy.

Food/Chores

15. The food was good at Newfield. The only chores I can remember would be washing the dishes.

School

16. I had a good education at Newfield. I sat and passed two O'rades in geography and history. There were teachers who came to Newfield to provide lessons.

Trips

17. There were plenty of trips to various places including the Lake of Monteith.

Visits/Inspections

18. Visitors were allowed to Newfield on a regular basis. My social worker Liz Reid also visited me. I don't remember any inspections taking place.

Healthcare

19. When I was treated for the STD that I contracted in London, HJZ [REDACTED] took me to the Southern General Hospital where I received some antibiotics.
20. I never received any dental care. This is something that I believe should have been dealt with as I could have learned from it.

Birthdays/Christmas

21. I celebrated my 16th birthday in Newfield. There wasn't any cards but I remember there was a birthday cake. I recall other residents also getting birthday cakes.
22. I spent one Christmas in care at Newfield.

Discipline

23. There was no particular discipline regime. If you were disciplined it would be that you were sent to your room or dormitory. This would normally be for using abusive language or similar.
24. I only seen someone being restrained by staff once. The force I would say was necessary and reasonable, nothing excessive.

Other Information

25. I did run away a couple of times from Newfield. Both times I managed to get to London before being taken back.

26. The first time I ran away to London I was a rent boy and it must have been about four weeks I was there. I got picked up by a doctor and stole his wallet. I tried to use his credit card and was caught by the police. I think that this was dealt with by a fine.
27. The second time I ran off to London I was away about two weeks before I was taken back.
28. The staff at Newfield were attentive and cared. I think that they realised I wasn't in the right environment. There were some inmates that were horrible people.
29. The only bad thing that happened to me there was once when I was on the phone to my gran. One of the inmates put the phone down and cut me off. I reacted and hit him with the phone as I was upset. He then threw a cup at me which hit me on the head. I still have the mark.

Leaving Newfield Assessment Centre

30. After I ran away the second time to London, I was put into a sort of half-way house for leaving care. This was at [REDACTED] Barrhead. It was run by an old woman whose name I can't remember. There were two other people staying there but I don't know their names either.
31. The old woman let out places on a room only basis. The room was barren and the woman who ran it had no interest in the people staying there. I hated living there. There was no contact and no support.
32. I don't know who made the decision for me to go there or who had responsibility. I was still under a supervision order at that time. I think I was at [REDACTED] for about 2 months.

33. I ran away again to London. As I had the supervision order hanging over me I knew that I had to go back to get that sorted out. I was still in contact with my social worker Liz Reid at this time.
34. I can't remember the exact date, but when I came back from London I had to attend another children's hearing. I was sent to Geilsland by the children's hearing whilst the supervision order was rescinded.

Geilsland Residential School, Ayrshire

35. Geilsland was in the middle of nowhere although it was a pleasant enough place. It was basically an educational establishment for delinquents. People who had maybe been violent within society and then placed there to continue their education. Geilsland was run by the Church of Scotland.

Routine at Geilsland

36. I can't remember my first day but I do recall being shown round and informed about the house rules. It was a big Victorian-style building in its own grounds. I had my own room. I think that there were also dormitories.
37. Geilsland was a single sex establishment. There were about 50 boys aged between 10 and 16 years old. There were 20 residential staff who worked on a rotating basis. I think that there were separate units within the building.
38. I don't think that Geilsland was an appropriate establishment for me as I was under supervision. Others that were there were under lockdown for carrying out muggings. In saying that, I didn't think that Newfield was an appropriate place for me either.
39. You didn't have to wear a uniform at Geilsland. There was access to showers and cleaning facilities.

Mornings and bedtime

40. We got up in the mornings about 8. It was friendly and relaxed. It was all educational at Geilsland. It was not a tight regime. You made your bed and kept your room tidy. I think lights out was about 10pm.

Food

41. The meals were always at set times and everyone ate together.

Chores

42. The only chores that I can remember were maybe sweeping up in parts of the units.

School / Leisure time

43. I didn't do any schooling at Geilsland as I had already sat my exams. As a result, my routine was different to the other residents. I was basically allowed out and about. I used to get a daily travel allowance, which was about £3 or £4. I would go on day trips and visit my auntie. I was left to my own devices most of the time. I also got pocket money to use at the shop on the premises to buy soft drinks and sweets.
44. If I couldn't get a lift to the station I would stay in my room listening to my music. That was until someone broke into the room and stole my Walkman and tapes. The door was off its hinges. I reported it to the staff but no one was ever identified for the break in. If I wasn't able to get out and about there were no specific activities put on for me.
45. There was no religious instruction at Geilsland.

Trips

46. There were regular trips to Pollock and the Magnum Centre. I enjoyed these trips. I cannot recall any socialising with the other boys in the establishment. I never had any extended holidays away from Geilsland.

Birthdays and Christmas

47. I didn't celebrate any birthdays or Christmas whilst I was at Geilsland. I was only there a short time.

Visits/Inspections

48. As with Newfield, there were regular visits allowed at Geilsland. Liz Reid visited me on a number of occasions. Visits from my gran and granddad were limited as neither of them could drive. I can't recall any inspections.

Abuse at Geilsland

49. I never saw any violence or the staff being physical towards other residents.
50. One of the staff, HNK [REDACTED], sort of befriended me. We both liked military history. We got on well. I would say that this went on for a couple of months. HNK [REDACTED] was a care worker I think. He was aged around late forties or early fifties.
51. Eventually HNK [REDACTED] asked me if I wanted to go on a trip to Islay, leaving from Oban. I don't know how he managed it but I was discharged into his care overnight.
52. I remember the drive to his home at [REDACTED] Bearsden. He put his hand on my leg and said, "Don't worry John, I know what you like". From his access to my records he would have known I was gay. HNK [REDACTED] was married but when we got to his house there was no-one home.

53. I slept on the sofa bed in his living room. At various points throughout the night he would come in the room and try to abuse me. He tried to touch me in a sexual way. He pestered me constantly. As an ex-street worker I knew how to deal with these things. All through the night he was there trying things. He had pornographic material and he was masturbating.
54. I started to doubt myself and question my self-worth. Everything leading up to this was so that he could try it on with me. HNK had groomed me and I felt let down. It was very hurtful that he seen me as a sex object.
55. The next day we went on the coach trip to Islay. It was just a day trip. HNK said to me "Don't forget I can get you kept in until you're 21". After the trip we went back to his house, picked up the car and drove straight to the home. I felt that after what he had said to me, he was trying to hold a "Sword of Damocles" over me.
56. Even after this I found out that he had went to my auntie's. She told me later, "The nice man, HNK" had visited her to ask how I was. I thought this was him trying to control me.
57. He never tried anything else on with me. If I saw him, most of the time it was silence. After this I was even more resentful of authority.

Leaving Geilsland

58. I left Geilsland in 1989 aged 17. This was after a children's hearing lifted the supervision order.
59. There was no after-care when I left Geilsland. There was nothing done to prepare me for life after care. I'm not sure if it would have helped me anyway.
60. I don't think I had any life skills but I feel that you learn these as you go through life.

Life after being in care

61. After I left care I went to Epsom in Surrey. I then went to Bristol where I got a job with a bank. I met someone but I found out they were HIV positive and we parted company. I went on to have various jobs in financial and recruitment roles. I was later made redundant and became a minicab driver in London for a time.
62. When I turned 40, it all started to go wrong. I started to dwell on what had happened to me. I questioned my self-confidence and why I had been put into care. I began to use drugs. This ended up with me being stopped in my car by the police in Notting Hill. I had no insurance and had drugs in my possession. When the police went to my house they found cannabis plants. As a result of this, I went to the doctor and asked for help. I managed to move on from that chapter. I feel it made me stronger.

Reporting of abuse at Geilsland

63. About 10 years ago when I was drunk I phoned Geilsland. I think that I was put through to the headmaster. I told him what had happened to me when I was with **HNK**. I was told that he had been dismissed after a similar incident. I was also informed that **HNK** was now deceased.
64. In 2011 I contacted the Church of Scotland and spoke with Jennifer Milligan, the safeguarding officer. I met with her in 2013 and discussed counselling. Jennifer confirmed **HNK** was deceased and that he had been dismissed from Geilsland for incidents similar to what had happened to me.
65. The church's intentions were good but their actions were poor. They were helpful but I found that they never got back to you when they said they would.

66. In 2016, I went to Forest Gate police station in London and reported what had happened to me. I spoke with PC Andrew Leigh. I felt that for me this was a useful exercise.

Impact

67. The impact on me as a result of being in care was that I had a lack of respect for authority. I developed a mistrust for a lot of things.
68. There was no structure to my care. I don't think they knew what to do with me. I felt unwanted and you think about the reasons why. I never had anywhere that I could call home. I was very envious of other people and I missed opportunities that others had.
69. I understand now why I was put into care; that it was for the good of me [REDACTED]. I used to hate my dad, but now I wish I knew him.

Records

70. I have had no access to my records although I haven't tried. It is something that I am thinking about doing.

Other information

71. I think intermittently about my time in care. It should have been time better spent.
72. I have contacted Future Pathways, a survivors group. I am now speaking to John Crawford who is my support co-ordinator. He is providing help and support to me. I think I make excuses not to go to counselling. It is something however I am considering. I don't suffer from depression but I can feel a bit anxious.

- 73. It should be remembered when people are in care, they are still children. When you come out of care there should be support available. On-going support should be provided until you are ready to leave care.

- 74. 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..... 1/9/17