

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GCI

Support person present: No

1. My name is GCI. My date of birth the 1951. I am 68 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I want to tell you about the time between 1963 and 1966 when I was in care at St John Bosco's List D School, Hillside, Aberdour in Fife. I cannot be exact about the time I was there.

### Life before going into care

3. I was born and brought up in Dundee. My parents' names were and they are both deceased. I was one of six children the others being and . I was the fourth oldest. My sister passed away when she was 51.
4. I think that my parents had a struggle to bring up so many children. There was only a year between each child being born and so we were all quite young. My father had a problem with alcohol and my mother who was much quieter, but the strong one, kept the family together. My father brought us up very strictly but he never abused or hit us. We were brought up in the Catholic faith.
5. I attended school at St Vincent's Primary School in Dundee. I was playing truant from school and refused to attend. I was getting into trouble for petty crimes. I was associating with boys who were getting into trouble and I suppose I could have been

classed as a juvenile delinquent. I don't remember dealing with the Social Services or police although my parents may have been dealing with them.

6. When I turned twelve years of age I went before a Children's Panel. The decision they made was to send me to St John Bosco's List D School in Aberdour, Fife so that I could complete my education. I assumed that this meant that I was going there until I was fifteen or sixteen and finished with school. I did not want to go there. I think that my brother [REDACTED] was also sent to an approved school in Edinburgh about the same time but I don't know where he was sent.

#### **St John Bosco's List D School, Hillside, Aberdour, Fife 1963 – 1966**

7. I remember arriving at the school in Fife. It was on a hill and there was a large fence round the playground and football pitch. I remember thinking the fence was too high to stop footballs being lost and so I had in my own mind that it was like a prison. There was a gate and I suppose it would have been easy to walk out but you were always being watched by the staff.
8. The school was run by the Salesian Brothers but I don't know much about how the structure worked with the Children's Panel. The school itself was a very large building and housed 35 boys who were all resident. The boys were aged between twelve and fifteen although some may have been slightly younger. It was a single sex school.
9. To the left of the main building was a small chapel which had a large cross on the front. The classrooms were in a building set apart from the main building. It took me a while to take it all in. There were two dormitories upstairs one of which was for bed wetters. There was one Brother on duty through the night.

**Routine at St John Bosco's List D School.***First day*

10. I recall being taken in a car straight from the Children's Panel. I remember walking down the steps with the driver of the car. I was met by **SNR** who was also a Priest called Father **LOB**. He told me that there were 35 other boys resident and three of them were from Dundee. The rest of the boys came from all over Scotland but the majority were from Glasgow. I was told I was there to complete my education and that I was to behave when I was at the school.
11. I was told that if I behaved after a period of time I would be allowed to go home and stay with my parents for short periods of time.

*Staff*

12. Some of the staff were called by their title, Brother and others were called Father. I am not sure how they differentiated between them and who were Priests and who were not. There were five or six Brothers working at the school.
13. I also remember two nuns who lived somewhere in the grounds and they looked after the Brothers. We had very little contact with the nuns. There were also some lay staff who did the laundry, cooking and cleaning.
14. There were a number of younger Brothers that came and went. They stayed at the school and took no part in teaching or helping with running the school. I can't remember any of their names. I am not sure why they were there.

*Description of Father **LOE***

15. He was a man in his 40's. He was tall, clean shaven and spoke with an English accent. He wore his robes and on occasion wore a hat. I don't recall him teaching he dealt with the boys and handed out punishment. He wanted to be the dominant

personality amongst the staff. He was the member of staff that had most dealings with all the children.

*Description of Father* LMY

16. He was the arithmetic teacher. He was about 50 and was small and fat faced. He spoke in a Scottish accent. I can't be sure of his age as they appeared to be very old to me. He also wore his robes.

*Description of Father* LOB

17. He was SNR at St John Bosco's. He was aged somewhere between forty and fifty but may have been younger. He spoke with an Irish accent. He was stocky build and had a fat face.

*Description of Father* LUF

18. He dealt with all things to do with sport at St John Bosco's. He was average height, black hair, Irish spoken. I suppose he was the equivalent of the PE teacher.

*Other pupils I recall at St John Bosco's*

19. There was an [REDACTED] who came from Glasgow he was born on the same day as me as I remember that we both got a birthday cake on the same day. [REDACTED] was my friend when I was there. There was a boy called [REDACTED] who I met in Perth Prison in later life but I can't recall his first name. There were others but I just can't remember their names. I did meet some of them in the prison system in the early 1980's when I was there but their names escape me.

*Mornings and bedtime*

20. You would be woken up by the Brothers quite early in the morning by the lights being put on. You would go for a wash in the bathroom then off to the chapel for prayers before breakfast.
21. All the boys went to school in the morning and there was a mid-morning break. You had lunch and then back to school. You would be at school until late afternoon and then you were allowed to play before tea. I can't remember what you did after tea although I remember playing football. There was no contact with the local people in Aberdour although some of them came to the church masses that were held in the chapel at St John Bosco's.

*Chores*

22. I don't recall having to do any chores as there were staff available to do the washing and cleaning. I think that the only thing I had to do was to cut the wood for Father

LMY

*Mealtimes / Food*

23. You would all eat together in a communal dining hall in the main building. The meals would be supervised by two Brothers. Mealtimes were very strict on behaviour. You sat at a table for four. The food was cooked by some lay staff who worked in the kitchen but you had limited contact with those staff members.
24. The meals were not too bad but you were required to eat everything on your plate. There was plenty to eat. If you didn't eat the food you would be punished although it was not usually corporal punishment. You could be sent out in the snow and told to run round the playground for half an hour or things like that. You also attended chapel for prayers in the evening before going to bed.

25. You always had supper in the evening before you went to bed. It was a cup of tea and a biscuit. If you didn't eat your meals during the day you would not be allowed supper. There was no force feeding or anything like that.
26. The only time I recall being happy when I was at St John Bosco's was when I was outside playing football in the grounds.

*Washing / bathing*

27. The showers had five cubicles and you had to shower five at a time. There was no privacy and one of the Brothers would always supervise showering. I think that although we washed every day we only showered once a week unless we were dirty after paying sport outside.

*Clothing / uniform*

28. You were given a shirt, socks, a pair of shorts and a jersey. You also had a winter coat and pyjamas. They were usually second hand. You didn't have your own clothes or any personal possessions.

*Peers and bullying.*

29. I don't remember any bullying and I don't recall ever being assaulted by the other boys. There were quite a few boys from Glasgow and other places in Scotland but there wasn't any gang culture. There was the odd fight so the staff would take you in to a room they called the gym but it was really a playroom. They gave you boxing gloves and you fought until the staff member said that was enough and that usually was the end of the matter. It did happen to me on the odd occasion. It wasn't really boxing but you were not allowed to kick or bite. I never recall any of the staff showing empathy to the boys.

*School*

30. I would describe the schooling as being quite basic. It covered all the main subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic. There was also a woodwork shop. I don't think that you got the same education that other children in main stream schooling were being taught. I was a curios child and spent a lot of time reading about world events and managed to self- educate myself on more universal issues which paid dividends in later years.

*Religious Education*

31. You did receive religious education in line with the Catholic beliefs. A lot of time was spent attending mass and saying prayers. I also acted as an altar boy as did most of the boys at the school at one time or another. Grace was said before every meal. There was one occasion when we were visited by <sup>LRM</sup> [REDACTED] who was [REDACTED] in Scotland. He said a mass at the chapel in St John Bosco's. He didn't talk to the boys at the school although we were dressed in our finest and we had to be on our best behaviour.

*Trips / Holidays*

32. There was one occasion when the Priests got three or four of the boys including me to go on a trip to Glasgow. We had to be smartly turned out. It was some sort of gathering of Catholic people. I recall that there were girls present who were wearing sashes over their clothes. I don't know where they were from but they might have been from other care homes or approved schools. I remember that we had to dance with them. I have no idea why we were there or what the event was but looking back it was all a bit strange. There was nothing sexual about it or anything like that.
33. There was another occasion when we went to Torry in Aberdeen for a week's holiday. We stayed in a local school there where they had set up camp beds in two of the classrooms. We went to Nazareth House in Aberdeen to have our meals but we had no contact with the children that were at Nazareth House.

34. We also went to an approved school somewhere on the west coast of Scotland. I think that the school was called St John's and it was an approved school. There were children there who were in a similar situation to ourselves although we were not encouraged to mix with them. I think that we also went to the swimming baths in Rosyth but that was only on a couple of occasions and was not a regular occurrence.

*Birthdays and Christmas*

35. Everyone who had a birthday at St John Bosco's was given a cake that was made on the premises. I don't think my parents sent me a birthday card or a present. I don't remember being given Christmas presents although I do recall that there was a large Christmas manger set up outside the chapel. I can't remember much about Christmas it was just another day. I don't recall any presents from home.

*Pocket money*

36. There was no such thing as pocket money and I don't recall ever getting many treats like sweeties or comics to read.

*Running away*

37. On the second day I was there I made the decision that I was not going to stay and decided to abscond. I knew that if I picked my moment I could walk out the gate at the front of the building. I didn't get very far I suspect I was less than half a mile away before I was caught. I was severely punished for that. I didn't run away again.

*Visits / Inspections/ Review of Detention*

38. My mother was told that she couldn't visit me until I had been at St Jon Bosco's for a full month. She did visit after a month and I told her about being assaulted by the staff when I ran away. The only other occasion that I remember my mother coming



was when she came with my younger brother on a sports day that was held at the school. There were lots of other parents and siblings that attended the sports day.

39. I cannot recall any visits from Social Workers and no one spent time with me and reviewed the care arrangement. I never went back to the Children's Panel. My understanding was that I was staying at St John Bosco's until I had finished up at school.

*Going on home visits.*

40. Some of the boys were allowed to go home if you earned enough stars for good behaviour. I think that you also had to have been there for three months before you qualified. There was a pecking order for going home. It was almost impossible to earn enough stars to get home. There was no chart on the wall for the stars or anything like that it was all kept in the head of Father LOB and he decided who could go home and who couldn't. It was not a fair system and it was very hard to achieve as the structure was too severe. I wasn't too bothered about going home anyway. I didn't see my parents for a whole year.
41. I think that in the three years that I was at St John Bosco's I maybe got to go home on four or five occasions. You would be taken to the train station and given a small suitcase with your belongings. The station staff knew where you were from. You would have to change at Kirkcaldy to get the train to Dundee where I would be met by my parents.
42. We were never encouraged to write to our parents and I never received a letter from my parents the whole time I was at St John Bosco's. I don't think that I ever made or received a phone call to them. On one occasion when I was home I was injured when my brother accidentally shot me in the eye with a slug gun pellet. I was in hospital for three weeks. I think that St John Bosco's considered this to be a reason for me not to get home leave as they may have felt I was at risk.

*Healthcare*

43. If someone took ill they would contact the local doctor or take them to hospital. I do recall going to the dentists in Dunfermline. I think that I only attended hospital on one occasion when I was about fifteen and had my tonsils out.

*Bed Wetting*

44. When I first arrived at St John Bosco's I was a bed-wetter. The staff didn't ask me if I had this problem before I arrived. After I wet the bed I was transferred into the dormitory for bed-wetters. There was about ten boys in this dormitory. When you stopped wetting the bed you were moved back into the main dormitory. They dealt with the bed-wetters very badly and forced you out of bed at all times of the night to change and shower.

*Punishment*

45. I don't recall any of the punishments that were handed out being recorded anywhere. I don't think that there was a punishment book. Informal punishment happened all the time day in day out. Boys would be hit with a belt or anything else that came to hand. You lived in constant fear of being hit by the staff.

**Abuse at St John Bosco's Aberdour 1963 - 1966**

46. When I ran away on my second day I was taken back to the school and told that I would be punished. The staff at the school said that they had no option but to punish me. They said that they couldn't allow me to run away. I think that there were two or three of the monks and they took me into a room next to the classrooms.

47. They severely assaulted me with a school belt. They told me to strip to the waist. I was hit on my arms, back and legs with the school belt. It was Father **LOE** who did the hitting and I think that Father **LOB** and another person held me down. I later learned that the other boys were in the classrooms adjoining the room I was being punished in were told to put down their pens and listen to what was happening.
48. I was severely beaten and as a result suffered a lot of bruises. I was still thinking about the beating for weeks after that. I decided that I would have to change my way of thinking and would have to just get on with it and conform to their ways. The day they handed out this punishment was carefully planned to have maximum effect on me and the other boys. I can't remember it happening to any other boys.
49. The whole time I was there I was living in a state of fear. We all were. The abuse was long term and happening all the time. I recall some silly punishments. I remember Father **LMY** who was a teacher of arithmetic. Father **LMY** would punish you for things like talking in class or not paying attention. He would draw a circle in chalk on his desk. He made you put your nose in the circle causing you to bend over. He then belted you on the backside over your clothing. If your nose lost contact with the desk he would hit you again until you complied. That happened to everyone.
50. You would eat your meals in a communal dining room which was supervised by the Brothers. There were four boys to a table. You would be told to be quiet and punished for talking or "carrying on" as young boys do. Father **LOE** used to hand out the punishments which usually involved being hit about the body with a belt. He would also grind his knuckles into the top of your head. This went on the whole time I was there.
51. Because I was a bed-wetter when I first arrived at St Bosco's I was put into the bed-wetters dormitory. There were about ten boys in that dormitory. What would happen is that the night staff would come round the dormitory through the night and check to see if you were wet. The Brother on duty would sit in a chair in the corridor outside

- the dormitory. Father <sup>LOE</sup> when he was on night duty would put his hands into your pyjamas around your private area and check to see if you were wet. I just took this as normal behaviour.
52. Father <sup>LOE</sup> and the other Brothers would make you get up if your bed was wet. He would make you take your wet sheets downstairs to the laundry in the basement. The Brothers would make you strip naked and then wash your sheets and pyjamas and take a cold shower. You then took fresh sheets and pyjamas and went back to bed. This could happen more than once through the night. It went on all the time to the bed-wetters. I took me two months to get over bed-wetting before I was allowed to move to another dormitory.
53. There was one occasion when I got up in the middle of the night to go to the toilet. I was friendly with another boy called [REDACTED]. On my way to the toilet I saw that [REDACTED] was sitting on the knee of Father <sup>LOE</sup> who was on night duty. I noticed that [REDACTED] was crying. At the time I thought that it was strange but now looking back I suspect that he was being sexually abused. Every time I recall these events it is Father <sup>LOE</sup> who appears to be the main perpetrator.
54. When you were showering it would be supervised by Father <sup>LOE</sup>. He would stand in the area where the showers were and there was no privacy. He was very keen that all the boys washed their private areas and would pull back the boys foreskins to ensure that they washed in that area. Again most of the boys thought that this was normal behaviour and was required. The other Brothers did not supervise the washing to that degree and would leave the boys to their own methods of washing.
55. You had to be on your guard all the time as none of the boys could trust the Brothers and the way that they ran the school. I recall that Father <sup>LMY</sup> lived in a house in the school grounds. I would be sent to the house to cut up firewood for him. I don't know if something happened to me there that I have no memory of but I asked the other Brothers not to send me back there and they agreed to this. It is something I have erased from my memory and no matter how hard I try I am unable to recall.

**Reporting of abuse at St John Bosco's, Aberdour. 1963 - 1966**

56. After I told my mother about what had happened after I ran away, she took it up with SNR [REDACTED] Father LOB [REDACTED]. He told my mother that they needed to punish boys who ran away and that is what they had done to me. He told my mother that I was a violent child and needed to be punished regularly when I misbehaved. Nothing ever happened as a result of me telling my mother and I didn't tell anyone else.
57. The facts are that I was not violent and that the punishment was so excessive it has left me mentally scarred all these years later.
58. On the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018 I was contacted by the police who came with an appointment to see me. It was just after I had applied to The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry to provide evidence. The police officer was called Craig Scott and he came from Queens Street Police Station in Aberdeen.
59. It was quite a taxing interview and they showed me a number of photographs which were of St John Bosco's School at the time I was there. I did recognise some of the Priests in the photographs but I could hardly recognise myself.
60. The police officer told me that what had happened to me amounted to sexual abuse. I disputed this with him but he told me that the touching in the showers and the touching in bed when testing for bed wetting was sexual abuse. I just couldn't understand this as I considered it normal.

**Leaving St John Bosco's Approved School, Aberdour – 1966**

61. Leaving St John Bosco's happened very quickly and without warning. I suffered from ongoing throat infections and when I turned fifteen I went to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and they took my tonsils out. I returned to St John Bosco's and was put into a room that I had never seen before. They told me that I would need to stay in bed

and rest for a few days. The room was called the sick bay which I had never heard of before. It was a single room with a bed and a wardrobe.

62. When I was in the sick bay I have a memory of an incident involving Father **LOE** and one of the nuns. I have blocked out this memory but I suspect that the nun was trying to protect me from Father **LOE**. I think that whatever this incident was it may have expedited my departure from St John Bosco's.
63. A few days after being admitted to the sick bay I was told that I was going home. I think that it was summer time when I went home but that would make me fourteen and a half.
64. In the last year I was at St John Bosco's I was seeing things in a different light. I felt very protective toward the other boys. I was rebelling against the staff and challenging their behaviour. On reflection I think that this was the first stage of being institutionalised. In later life I was described by medical staff as being subversive and anti-authoritarian.
65. I was put on the train and arrived home to find that my home situation was still as chaotic and my father was still drinking. I told my parents that I was not going back. I managed to get a job in a jute mill in Dundee. I had no training and no qualifications and spent most of my life doing labouring jobs.

#### **Life after being in care**

66. I got married when I was nineteen. It only lasted for eight years as I was still self-destructing and couldn't form attachments. I went to prison for two years and that was what ended my marriage. I did keep in touch with my family for a few years but it got less and less until I lost contact altogether. I had two children in this marriage but I don't see them. I had mental health problems and was diagnosed as being bipolar.

67. I got re-married in the early 1980's to [REDACTED] and we have three children and grandchildren with which I have a loving relationship although I find it hard to tell them how I feel about them.

### **Impact**

68. I often question myself about my time at St Bosco's and wonder if some of the things that happened to me actually did. There are some things that happened I have shut out of my memory and I can't recall what happened. All that I know is that something did happen.
69. I could never stick at any job. I found that I didn't want to be part of anything and although I was good at what I did I would just up and leave and move on to the next job. I had mental health problems and in 2004 I was seeing Dr Shepherd who was a Psychiatrist at the Mental Health Unit, Wedderburn House in Dundee who treated me with Lithium. Dr Shepherd felt that my issues may be a result of my time spent at St John Bosco's. I was diagnosed as bi-polar.
70. I would say that for ten years after care at St John Bosco's I was badly affected by what had happened to me. I didn't realise the effect that it was having on my behaviour and it took a long time for me to come to terms with the effects. I was self-destructing. It was not without consequences with the breakup of my first marriage and my inability to keep at the same job. I find it hard to show empathy with my family although I love them all.
71. I didn't accept the diagnosis of being bi-polar and I tried to pretend it wasn't happening to me. Last year however I appeared in a film made for people who are learning about mental health. I think it was aimed at university students as a teaching aid. I enjoyed the thought of making people aware. I am also a member of a mental health group called Dundee Voluntary Action who meet to help people with issues. It took me a long time to settle in to this group but I have now been with them for ten years. I also sing in a choir and have been able to stick at it with people from all walks of life who accept me as I am.

72. There is an expression amongst people who have spent time in institutions which is "having been round the houses". I feel that it is very accurate as it exactly describes what has happened to me and the other people who came through the care and prison system . I am one of the lucky ones who have managed through realisation and sheer will to get "off the institutional wheel" and change my approach to life.
73. I feel that in the last fifteen years I have managed to see things in a different light. My mental health has improved as a result of the professional help and medication I have received. I have been taught how to cope with what happened to me in care. I feel I am much more empathetic to other people and can now tolerate physical affection which I avoided before.
74. I am still a practising Catholic but resent the way the Catholic faith was imposed upon me when I was at St John Bosco's. I felt we were being radicalised in the Catholic faith when I was at St John Bosco's. I was at a very impressionable age when I was in care and feel that the religious input was very excessive.
75. I no longer fight my mental health issues but have managed to find a way to live with them and accept things as they are. I am aware that it will always be there but I have found a way to deal with them.

### **Records**

76. I have never tried to get my records.

### **Lessons to be learned**

77. When children are young, society should take responsibility for them. They have to realise the effect on children when they are effectively locked up in a care home. By being in care and being abused it is easy to put children who become adults on a path where marriages are broken, prison is a strong possibility and suffering mental health problems is very common.



78. I suspect that Father **LOE** is now dead and he will escape punishment. I hope the Inquiry can find a way to prevent the abuse happening again. If there is a way of associating my mental health which I have suffered all my adult life with what happened to me in care then the people who put me there and supposedly looked after me should be punished.

79. 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..... **GCI** .....

Dated..... 28.11.19 .....