

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

IKO

Support person present: No

1. My name is IKO. My date of birth is 1994. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. When I was growing up I was always under the impression that my surname was IKO but when I was about fifteen my sister found my birth certificate which showed it was actually IKO. I have never used that name and I later had it changed under Deed Poll to IKO. All my paperwork from my time in care is under the surname IKO.
3. I was born in Irvine, North Ayrshire and raised in the Ardrossan area. To start with it was with my mum, and dad, . My dad left when I was about three or four years old. He left because of issues surrounding domestic violence. I have a younger sister and a younger brother .
4. For a short period after dad left, we moved in with my nana and papa, where it was fairly stable. Mum then got a house in . When we stayed there, I was going to Stanley Primary School. I started having problems at school because I was being bullied. The school did not actively address the bullying and it continued. My behaviour in school deteriorated. I was also having problems at home as well as being bullied and getting in to fights within the local community. During this time my mum had also developed an alcohol addiction. It was also at this time that the son of my mum's friend who was slightly older than me began to abuse me sexually. This went

on for years and was not something which my mum or the mother of the boy knew about. Both myself and my sister had also been witness to significant incidents of domestic violence from one of my mum's previous partners who was a diagnosed schizophrenic, he took a particular disliking to myself, and I was often at the forefront of his frustration, due to trying to stop him from abusing my mum.

5. We stayed [REDACTED] from the local social services office. One day I went running in there, followed by mum. I told the people that mum had threatened me with a knife and thrown an object at me, which my younger sister had witnessed. That eventually led on to charges being made against mum, not something I wanted. She was telling people that I had threatened her with a knife too. Our lives at that time were very chaotic. Mum had suffered from addiction problems most of her life and at that time she was not only an alcoholic, but she had also developed an addiction to heroin. We were being left to our own devices and we did not have any guidance or positive role models to show us what we should be doing. Most days there would be drug users in my mum's house from early in the morning until the early hours of the next morning, this was completely normal for us. We would often walk into a kitchen and all of the adults would be passed out on the kitchen table. Police regularly attended my mum's house in search of my stepdad who often had warrants out for his arrest. There was also a heroin dealer living in my mum's living room at one point, again all of this seemed completely normal to us at that time.
6. Being a young age and not having a positive role model to look up to, with little to no support, whilst being bullied at school and dealing with the chaos at home and also trying to protect my siblings and worry about my mum, after also experiencing and witnessing significant abuse towards myself and my mum, caused me to become an extremely anxious, frustrated and confused child. I would get annoyed at my mum due to her drinking and drug taking and the way she behaved. The fact that she didn't have the patience to understand how I was feeling, made me even more frustrated.
7. From the time I ran into their office there was ongoing contact with the social work department. There were also reports being made by our neighbours about issues in our house. My mum was using me as the scapegoat for the problems in the house.

My mum continually used my behaviour to deflect from her own problems. Some of the reports I have show that professionals recognised that there were significant problems within the family home and that as they put it “I should not continue to be the blame for the family’s problems.” This seems to have been lost in translation immediately after it being acknowledged. They believed what mum was telling them and I was classed as a problem child who was out with control. Myself and my siblings were all vulnerable children who needed to be safeguarded due to our mum’s addiction problems and chaotic lifestyle.

8. My behaviour continued to deteriorate at home and within the community, with my mum regularly telling me that I would soon be going into a home. My mum also regularly attended social services office at Bridgegate house telling them to take me in to care. I was taken to a Children’s Panel not long after my 11th birthday, when the social work decided I was to be taken from mum and placed into care. I was extremely upset at hearing this news. They then took me directly from the Panel to the children’s home at McKellar Avenue, Ardrossan. It was Lorraine Marshall who was my scoops worker at the time.

Children’s Home, McKellar Avenue, Ardrossan

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Leaving Children's Home, McKellar Avenue, Ardrossan

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Children's Home, Lochgoilhead

45. I was then taken to a place at Lochgoilhead by two social workers, where I spent a week. Secondary Institutions - to be published later
- Secondary Institutions - to be published later

46. At the end of the week, I was back at McKellar Avenue. I think it may have been Anne Reid that took me back. I think I was back at McKellar Avenue for a couple of months, and I was told I was being sent to Oakbank in Aberdeen. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

48. Fiona my key worker and another member of staff then took me to Oakbank. When we arrived there I was told that this was an initial visit, but it was later explained to me that I would not be going back to McKellar Avenue. This was not something that had been discussed previously at all. They then told me they had found a temporary foster placement where I would be going, prior to being admitted to Oakbank. They also told me they were taking me to the local Asda to get me some new clothes as I had none of my belongings with me. After being at the shop they took me to the foster carers.

Unknown foster carers, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], Aberdeenshire

49. When I arrived, I was introduced to [REDACTED] and his wife [REDACTED]. I don't know their surnames. I can remember going there and being really upset at not being allowed to go back to McKellar Avenue and the shock of just being told that I wouldn't be going back. I didn't like change. Fiona, who was my key worker, was visibly upset at having to leave me there. Despite this, the atmosphere with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] was really relaxed. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

being allowed to sit in the conservatory to have a smoke. It was nice to experience a normal functioning family environment. I can remember having our meals, sitting around the table, and all having normal conversations. Whenever they were going out to the shops or other places I was allowed to go with them.

50. They had their own adult children. The older son lived with his Korean girlfriend and their other son had completed University and was back at the home. They also had a girl that they had adopted. I think she was about six years old. It was a really lovely home. I think I stayed with them for two weeks.
51. At the end of my time there I was picked up again by staff from McKellar Avenue. They were expecting that they were going to be able to take me to Oakbank, but there were no places available, and I had to go back the staff to McKellar Avenue.
52. I was back at McKellar Avenue for a few days before I was back at a panel, and they confirmed there was now a space available to Oakbank.

Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen.

53. I was just turned twelve years old when I was transferred to Oakbank School in Aberdeen. It would have been in [REDACTED] 2006, and I stayed until [REDACTED] 2007. When I went in the front doors I found all the doors inside were locked. The units at the home were Dee, Esk, Oakhill, Clover, Rosemount, and Ashgrove.
54. On the ground level you would have the staff office, the quiet room, living room, kitchen, and a seating area.

Routine at Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen.

First day

55. I was allocated to Oakhill Unit, a mixed unit of children who were again all much older than me. As far as I'm aware I was supposed to be placed in the all-girls unit Clover, but due to Clover not having the room for me I was placed in Oakhill. We were each

in our own rooms at Oakhill. The windows had a bar along the bottom to prevent it being opened the whole way.

Mornings and bedtime

56. I would be woken in the morning and make my way to the bathroom. There were a row of sinks and two shower cubicles. Sometimes [REDACTED] and I would sneak a cigarette when we're in there. We would then have breakfast and into classes for lessons.

Mealtimes/Food

57. We ate our breakfast at a table in our own kitchen area. For lunch and dinner, we all ate together at the school canteen during the week. I cannot remember the food being anything but terrible. I did not like having to queue up to get my food due to being youngest in the school and felt really intimidated, especially when the canteen was full, usually with around 100 young people maybe more. I was never supported by staff to overcome this. Additionally, because I did not like most of what they served, my diet went to pot as I would mainly eat things which could be easily prepared and eaten in the unit, things like cheesy pasta, cereal, toast. The staff did breakfast, lunch, and dinner meals during the weekend. Sometimes the meals cooked on the weekend by the staff were quite nice, but there was no consistency.
58. There were no issues from the staff when we did not eat the food, we just went hungry.

Clothing/uniform

59. Although I had some clothes, I was taken out on different times where the staff would take me out to the shops to get some new clothes. I think it was Monica, one of the staff, who took me out. I remember when I was at the previous home I liked dressing like a tomboy. When I went out with Monica she tried to persuade me to buy more girly clothes. I was initially slightly reluctant but just having someone take the time to

actually talk with me about it and encourage me in a positive way, gave me the motivation and confidence I needed to do something different.

Leisure time

60. To fill in any free time I had at the school it all depended on staff or vehicle availability. If both were available sometimes, we were taken out to go swimming or for a meal. As part of the education side of the school we could pick an activity we would like to get involved in. That might have been every couple of weeks. If I was allowed to go on one of them, I usually selected to go horse riding. It was not a regular thing to go on an activity it was really random when we were able to go.
61. In the unit there was a pool table and a table tennis table. I would spend hours playing pool and got quite good at it.
62. At Oakbank I was marked as a complete refusal for any cigarettes. This was quite frustrating for me as other kids and staff were able to have a smoke, pretty much whenever they wanted. There were even times when I was with staff going to the shops and they would have a smoke at the car, I obviously wasn't allowed one. Staff members and social services had absolutely no consideration for how the impact of being addicted to cigarettes affected my behaviour, staff knew it was a trigger point for my behaviour and did absolutely nothing to make things easier for me in terms of actually supporting me in a therapeutic and considerate way in order to effectively address my addiction to smoking. It also in my opinion should/would have been obvious that my addiction to cigarettes left me extremely vulnerable to exploitation from other young people.

Trips and holidays

63. I don't remember being taken away on any trips or holidays.

School

64. The school was within the home and from what I can remember I think it was a normal curriculum, but then I had never experienced a normal curriculum to compare it with.

Healthcare

65. My behaviour at Oakbank continued getting worse. I got very close to another older girl called [REDACTED], she tried to look out for me as best she could. I remember one night I saw [REDACTED] out of her room, and I could see she had cut her arms. I was confused why someone would do this. One of the night staff explained to me why some people did this.
66. It was very soon after that, that I started to self-harm. I was self-harming for most of the remaining time I was in Oakbank and stopped pretty much immediately after leaving Oakbank. I learned from [REDACTED] many different places I could get a [REDACTED] or something [REDACTED] to use.
67. The staff began to carry out daily room searches looking for tobacco, lighters, or anything that I could harm myself with.
68. I was never taken to the hospital or to see a doctor for my self-harming. I now have many significant scars on my arms. The staff did not as far as I'm aware send a referral to any psychologist, where I might have been given some help or support in order to address my clearly deteriorating mental state. On one occasion I had a particularly deep cut on my wrist and Susanne, one of the staff, saw it, she said she would radio one of the senior staff, LAJ [REDACTED] to see if she agreed that I needed to go to hospital to perhaps have some butterfly stitches. LAJ [REDACTED] came round and had a look. Despite the injury she said I did not need to go to the hospital, and she said it was superficial and would not scar. The staff never took the self-harming seriously, it was almost normalised by them, in the sense that you'd come and show them your arm, they would bandage you up and that would be that, they'd go on doing room searches and trying to stop me from obtaining [REDACTED] but they never actually discussed with

me why I was self-harming or tried to get me proper support to discuss it with someone else who could help me to address the reason for me self-harming.

Family contact

69. I think mum came up to Oakbank twice while I was there. One of the occasions I was allowed to go out with her, my stepdad, brother, and sister. On another occasion my nana came with mum to see me, and the staff wanted me to sit in the quiet room in order to have my contact and open my Christmas presents which my nana had brought me. Mum was not happy with this, but I think the reason for this was the staff were concerned mum or nana would pass me some cigarettes.

Discipline

70. In Oakbank if I did not comply with what the staff wanted me to do I would be asked or if reluctant made to sit in the quiet room until the staff decided that they had gained complacency. There would be staff sitting in the room while I was there. If I tried to leave the quiet room, then I would be restrained. If my behaviour deteriorated whilst being in the quiet room due to me feeling confined and cornered and again being triggered into a fight or flight state it would end up with me being restrained, more often than not it was the prone restraint, with staff members holding my face to the floor, leaving me with carpet burns. If I lashed out at staff, they would press charges. I could be sat in the quiet room for days on some occasions, only being let out to go to the toilet and shower. I was not the only one, it happened to [REDACTED] and pretty much any other young person who wasn't seen to be complying. Other than the seats there was nothing in the room and the curtains were supposed to be closed at all times. Trying to open the curtains would result in me being restrained. At times I felt like a caged animal being in that quiet room, and I'm certain other young people would have felt the same. I can remember on one occasion I had been in the quiet room for a significant amount of time and had asked the staff to let me out of the quiet room, I felt cornered and again triggered in to fight or flight mode tried to climb out the window, this ended in me being restrained.

71. Sometimes the staff would try to engage you in conversations whilst in the quiet room, but they never wanted to actually help you manage your behaviour or understand why you were behaving that way in order to help you. It would always be them highlighting all of my negative behaviours and then highlighting the impact it would have on my future, and then then making observations as to what my future would then entail as a result of all of these negative things. That just led to more frustration, especially given everything I had already experienced. I knew I had been treated unfairly previously and I knew I was being treated unfairly at that point, but I had no idea how to articulate myself, resulting in my deteriorating behaviour.

Abuse at Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen.

72. From the first day arriving at Oakbank I can remember hearing lots of raised voices and noises of people being restrained. That blew my mind, **Secondary Institutions - to be published later**
Secondary Institutions - to be published later As my time progressed in Oakbank I found that restraints became a daily occurrence.
73. The culture within Oakbank surrounding restraints at that time was in my opinion abusive. Restraints were normalised and used as a first resort in order to gain compliance from young people. Prone restraints were used the vast majority of the time, resulting in carpet burns to the chin and neck and knees, these were seen as the norm. Other young people had carpet burns too, in the same places for the same reasons. Our needs were never taken in to account before, during or after the restraints. On one particular occasion I was being restrained in the quite room by the manager of the unit **IKQ**, there were I think two other female staff members in the room. **IKQ** sat on top of my legs, I'm not sure what restraint was used but he was hurting me to the point I was crying and begging him to move himself off my legs. He continued to sit on my legs for some time whilst I was shouting and crying for him to get off and the two female staff members watched on. He eventually got off me. I don't remember much of what happened after that, but I remember feeling extremely wary of **IKQ** after that incident. I wanted to stay away from him.

74. There were three separate occasions when I was subjected to sexual exploitation during my stay at Oakhill in Oakbank. The first occasion was with one of the residents, [REDACTED]. He would have been fifteen at the time and I would still be about twelve. I was in his bedroom along with a girl called [REDACTED]. She left and when she was out of the room he exposed himself to me. I immediately left the room as well.
75. On another day, when I was still twelve, I ended up running away with [REDACTED] and another boy called [REDACTED]. I am not sure of his surname. I am not sure why we were running away this time, but probably because of me wanting cigarettes. We were just walking away and looking for somewhere to get out of the snow. We ended up in a doorway or entrance to some flats. When we were standing there [REDACTED] repeatedly tried to insert his penis in me. I was so young he couldn't, and it was hurting. When he was doing this [REDACTED] was keeping watch from further down the stair hallway, He eventually stopped, and we made our way back to Oakbank.
76. [REDACTED] was in a relationship with one of the other female residents. They had an argument when we were back in the home, and they split up because when he had ran away and I was with them. [REDACTED] then decided to report what had happened with [REDACTED]. The staff reported the matter to the police. When the police spoke to me the first time I denied that anything had happened. When I spoke with them again I told them what actually happened. I told them I had not talked about it the first time as I did not want to talk about it with anyone. The file on the case was then closed with no action taken. The staff moved [REDACTED] to a different unit which was just for boys.
77. In relation to this incident, I later submitted a SAR to the police, and it was shown that it was filed as an offence of unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor under the age of thirteen. It shows that no further action was taken.
78. The third occasion would have been when I was still twelve, when I had ran away with another boy called [REDACTED] from the unit. There were another boy us. The reason for me running away more than likely would have related to cigarettes. When we were away I ended up having sexual intercourse with the boy [REDACTED] on two

occasions. We then made our way back to Oakbank. When we were back somehow the staff found out. There were four or five members of staff who came barging into my room in what I would describe as a raid like fashion. They told me that I was being moved out of my unit into Esk, an empty unit next door to Oakhill. The way I was made to feel by the staff and the police after both of these occasions of sexual exploitation was that I was not a victim, I felt disgusted in myself. I was never given any counselling or support following these incidents. I remember a staff member had given me some Disney videos when I first arrived at Oakhill and said I could keep them. She was one of the staff who came in to tell me I was being moved to Esk, she said she no longer wanted me to have the videos, I asked her why, I can't remember what she said but I remember feeling utterly ashamed of myself.

79. I was isolated in Esk unit for a couple of weeks and was not allowed to attend school or go out of the unit at any time. I had to watch all of the other young people walk past my unit along with [REDACTED]. He was allowed to stay in the unit.
80. In addition to the two reported incidents there was also occasions of sexual exploitation which were not reported. This again happened in Oakhill and was with an older boy called [REDACTED] in the home, he was quite a quiet lad, followed the rules, was well Liked by staff members. Like me he enjoyed playing pool. At Christmas it was just me and him that were in the unit, the rest had been allowed home leave. We were in the living room and on the couch. He asked me to sit on his knee and was moving me up and down on his lap. It stopped when he realised the staff would be aware if he continued. It happened on a second occasion with him but this time it was in his bedroom. No one found out about this, and I did not tell the staff. I've since found out that he did this to another girl within the unit as well as myself.

Reporting of abuse at Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen.

81. The way I was treated by staff prior to and following these incidents of sexual exploitation directly resulted in me being unable to speak at length about what had

happened to me and how it had made me feel. Had I have been supported with understanding and compassion, I would have been more likely to have felt safe enough to be able to trust the professionals such as my staff members, social services and the police to do the right thing and safeguard me from further harm whilst also supporting me to address the exploitation I had suffered.

82. The culture within Oakbank surrounding restraints made it impossible for any young person to speak out about how they were being treated, it was the complete norm for us. The majority of us were far away from home with the only people they're to look after us being the people who were mistreating us. We couldn't just ask to go and see our social worker or ask our family to come around and see us.

Leaving Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen.

83. After being moved out of Oakhill and ending up being in Esk for a temporary period I was moved over to Clover unit, an all-girls unit. By this time, I was not having much contact with my family, and they were refusing to facilitate any visits with mum.
84. My behaviour continued to deteriorate due to the way in which I was being treated and the lack of family contact. The final straw was me running away to my mums after stealing money from a staff purse, I got the first train I could back to my mums in Kilwinning where I spent the weekend. The staff reported me missing and checked with mum, but she told them she had not seen me. I spent time with my siblings, my mum and got to see my nana. My mum sent me back on the train a few days after I arrived. I went back to Oakbank and told them nothing about where I had been.
85. When I was back I was isolated in the quiet room. They also made up a small room for me in the school area. After a couple of days of this they came in and told me I was leaving that day. When they told me I was leaving they also said I was being sent to a home in England.

86. I think it was Jane Arrowsmith and either John McNally or LIM [REDACTED] that took me away from Oakbank. I was taken to Greencorns Home in Warrington. I have no idea why they chose that place and why I was to be sent away from the authorities in Scotland. I am also not aware if my family were told or what discussions took place. The social work just decided to terminate my stay and have me placed into a different type of placement. I had no family connections whatsoever in that part of the country.
87. When I arrived at Greencorns I was made aware that it was just me and two members of staff. My behaviour changed drastically after moving to Greencorns. I was finally put in a therapeutic environment where my needs and trauma were properly being addressed and restraints were used as a last resort, resulting in a significant decline in me needing to be restrained. I was given positive role models, went to regular dance classes and singing lessons, out for meals with staff to the cinema. I was able to go shopping with staff and pick the food I wanted and help cook it. After moving to England, I put on quite a bit of weight as my diet was no longer restricted in the way it was at Oakbank. The stability, care, and compassion that Greencorns and the staff provided me with was invaluable and should have been something I experienced from the point of me entering the care system. I stayed with Greencorns up until the point I left care [REDACTED]
88. When I was 15 I met my first serious boyfriend. I was eventually allowed overnight stays when I was 16. I was young and I liked the novelty of having a new boyfriend and being able to stay out. Something I was never allowed to do, I stayed out a few nights of the weeks. After a while, the staff told me they didn't like this. I had been allocated a new manager for my care home who had previously been a support worker.
89. He told me that as a result of me treating the place like a hotel I would need to think about leaving and getting my own place.
90. When I was sixteen I was discharged from all social work care. Just prior to leaving my social worker at the time Lindsay palmer left to go on maternity leave and a new social worker was put in place. The new social worker took the same approach that

Lorraine had previously taken. Viewed me as a problem, I received little to no support from Kay Rodden whilst she was my social worker.

91. I was due to appear at a panel and I got the appointment time mixed up and ended up being late. My social worker had accused me of missing the appointment on purpose as to somehow inconvenience her. This was eventually re-arranged, and I was signed off from the care system. I was allocated a flat by Greencorns in Warrington. I did not stay there long and moved in permanently with my boyfriend.

Life after being in care

92. There was a lot of time after leaving care that I felt alone and was missing being with the staff from Greencorns. They had all been part of my life for so long and after leaving the care system I felt like I had been abandoned. People who had been consistently there for me, who told me they cared for me, for years were no longer a part of my life and I was left to sort it out on my own.
93. Despite being in England I was supported by throughcare in Saltcoats, Scotland, by a lady called Jean. Jean was someone who I was able to call when I needed support with things like getting furniture, clothes, interview stuff, and visiting my family. Throughcare also arranged for one of the staff from Greencorns to give me some support locally. The staff member Victoria Minshull, who had previously looked after me supported me in looking at college applications and figuring out what it was that I wanted to do, my goals, ambitions, and plans for the future. She also helped put other things in place like housing and financial advice to get me started. I Ironically, studied Health and Social Care, when I went to college. I go on the course as I wanted to study Midwifery. After I started college I had to explained to my tutor that I had criminal record and the length of it. The principal of the college asked to speak with me. She told me that based on the fact that I had a criminal record that it was extremely unlikely that I would be even considered as a potential candidate to be a midwife. She also advised me that it would likely be the same for other employer within the health and social care industry too. I was distraught. I went home feeling upset and deflated and not really

knowing what to do with my future. After a lot of thought I decided to continue with the course. I went to college for three 3 years and achieved a level 3 diploma in health and social care as well as doing my English and achieving a B. I eventually ended up having to leave College as I did not have enough money to support myself during my studies.

94. I did however manage to get a job within the health and social care industry. After the initial interview where I told them about my care experience and before being taken on I had to sit with one of the top managers and go through each of the charges on my conviction list. I had to describe all the details and background to every individual charge on my record. Nothing in those records relate to anything after I left the care system, it all relates to my time being under the age of 16. I worked for the company for 2 years but had to leave as the travel was proving too much. I have been in my current job, in customer service, for the last seven years. And will be starting to study for a degree in ecology at the beginning of next year.
95. I now have a partner, we have three children and we've managed to create a life that neither myself nor the people who failed me would have ever imagined for me.

Impact

96. Until recently I did not realise how much my time in care had affected me. After becoming a mum my perspective on how I was treated during my time in care changed drastically. I cannot begin to fathom how so many professionals continually failed me. Having to live with the consequences of those failings, losing my childhood and my innocence as a result of those failings, my inability to trust my own judgement due to social services and staff members continually normalising the unfair way they treated me after I was exploited and restrained. The things I have lost as a result of the failings of numerous professionals is something I don't think I will ever be able to fully come to terms with. The injustice is something that lives with me. Going through my social work records brought back a lot of the feelings I had during my time in care, but also gave me the ability to understand why I had those feelings. For a very long time up

until the last few years I had gone through my entire life thinking and believing that I had been this problem child. The problem child that my mum and social work had portrayed me as.

97. I now realise that I was just a child reacting to the circumstances I landed in. My behaviour was completely understandable given everything that I'd witnessed during my young life. Social services in my opinion breached their duty of care to myself on numerous occasions. Social services enabled my mother to deflect attention away from herself by using me as a scapegoat for the source of the family's problems.
98. The way I was treated throughout my time in the care system has caused me to suffer from what I now realise to be an imposter syndrome, where no matter what I do or achieve, I feel it is never good enough. I am going through some trauma therapy at the moment in order to address the trauma which has been unaddressed for so long, I am hoping this will give me some form of closure.
99. The relationship with my siblings has been significantly impacted by the care system. Both myself and my sister [REDACTED] have remained extremely close, probably due to our age at the time we were separated. Our little [REDACTED] however, we haven't had contact with him since he was 7 years old that was over 10 years ago. He lives in a foster placement locally to my sister. I've also regularly contacted social services to check on his welfare and make them aware of our contact details. Social services should in my opinion do all they can to promote sibling relationships to ensure that the children have a close bond with people who are biologically related to them. Preventing siblings from having contact permanently damages the relationship between them forever. Regardless of whether we do manage to have a relationship with our little brother at some point in the future it will never be the same as it would have been had we have been able to maintain regular contact. We are effectively strangers to our little brother, as a result of social services decision making.

Reporting of Abuse

100. The extent of what I went through never actually became apparent to me until after I had my own children. The way I had been treated had conditioned me in to thinking that it was normal, resulting in me burying every single trauma that I'd ever experienced. I was never in a position mentally and emotionally to be able to process the trauma that I had experienced. Having my children has enabled me to really start to think about these traumas from a perspective that I never had before and has in turn empowered me to be able to speak freely about the injustices that I continually experienced at the hands of social services. I have been told I am not eligible for the Redress scheme as the abuse I suffered is after the cut-off date of 2005. I have recently taken advice from a solicitor and am hoping to take action against the LAC who had care over me.

Records

101. I do have some of my social work records, but I am awaiting the remainder. My solicitor is assisting with this.

Lessons to be learned

102. I think it's extremely important that social services ensure that they are continually taking a therapeutic approach when dealing with children entering the care system. Had they have taken that approach with myself in the initial stages, I do believe my time in the care system would have been different.
103. Restraints should be used on a bare minimum last resort basis, in order to minimise further trauma to the young person. The traumatic effects of the use of restraints on children should not be minimised, and the impact on the child's future mental health also needs to be considered before, during and after a restraint is used. Simply asking a child to fill out a form after they've been restrained is not enough. Restraints are

dehumanising and will inevitably trigger children into a state of fight or flight. The normalisation and condoning of such volatile behaviour is extremely damaging for the child and their future.

104. I think the inquiry needs to look at the criminalisation of children within the care system, specifically following the use of restraints. I would often be charged for assault for lashing out during restraints due to feeling scared and powerless. It made me think that what these people were doing to me was ok, the police thought it was and I was the one being punished, and these people were supposed to look after me so I must have been the bad one. Children should not be punished for acting on their instinct when put in a situation which is inevitably going to trigger a fight or flight response, it is in my opinion unethical. It also completely destroys the relationship between the young people and the professionals caring for the young person, making it impossible for the young person to trust the people who have care over them. I have a criminal record which is extremely lengthy, the vast majority of charges being from me lashing out during restraints. After leaving care I have had absolutely no involvement with the police. I think that speaks volumes. Having to explain every single one of those charges to my future employer in order to actually obtain employment was not a nice experience. Knowing that no matter what I do I will forever have those charges on record, despite the circumstances in which they happened being extremely traumatic for myself, it just doesn't feel justified.
105. Independent advocacy workers should be made available to all children within the care system and should continually be offered as a source of support for the child from the point of them entering the care system to the point of them leaving the care system.
106. Children's homes are not healthy environments for children to grow up in. The vast majority of children being housed in these homes have experienced their own traumas, which brings with them their own challenges. Combining multiple children of different age groups who are all experiencing challenges emotionally and expecting bullying, exploitation, abuse, and mistreatment not to happen is unrealistic.

- 107. I hope that the people who were supposed to look after me staff members, social workers, panels members, other professionals, as unrealistic as it sounds, I hope they all know and understand that how they treated me was completely wrong and that their actions resulted in me being continually re-traumatised. All of the professionals who had the chance to make a positive impact on my life but instead did the opposite.
- 108. The few staff members who did connect with me are still people I think fondly of today, those people were the people who really made a difference. Who looked at me and seen ME, not the behaviour. I hope that this type of culture and treatment towards children in care is encouraged and normalised, so that more children are able to thrive and benefit from the many positives which do exist within the care system.
- 109. When things are going wrong for children they must be enabled to feel empowered enough to speak freely about what they are feeling without constant criticism and negative judgement.

Other information

- 110. I would hope that the organisations I was part of are all held accountable for what happened to me and others. There must be an awareness of faults, not only in the past, but in today's care system.
- 111. 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..... 07 June 2023