

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

LAF

Support person present: No

1. My name is LAF My date of birth is 1993. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I was known by the name LAF when I was in care. LAF was my father's name. I changed my name when I left care and I got married. It was simply because I chose to bury my past. There are very few people in my life who know that I was in care.

Life before going into care

3. I was born in Kilmarnock. I lived with my mother and father in Kilmarnock. My mother's name is and my father is My mother worked in various jobs such as in factories, as a cleaner and as a cook. I have two full brothers, and , who are both younger than me. was born in 2000 and was born in 1999. I believe I have other siblings from after my mother and father split up and entered other relationships, but I have no contact with any of them.
4. I was brighter than they gave me credit for. When I was seven or eight, I delivered one of my little brothers when my mother was in labour. My dad was upstairs in the bedroom, passed out drunk. My mum was in labour in the living room and I delivered

5. I remember my mum and dad splitting up but I don't know how old I was at the time. We moved to new build houses in Kilmarnock and were living at [REDACTED]. It wasn't too long after we moved in there that everything got worse. My dad was an alcoholic. He was a very heavy drinker and had to have a liver or a kidney transplant because of it. He was also extremely violent. He was a very volatile man. My father was violent towards everyone. He had the worst temper of anyone I have ever known. I think it got worse as I got older. I would take the beatings for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] because they were still kids. They were my family and I did what I had to do to protect them.
6. The family situation was horrendous. My mum took us to various temporary accommodations to get us away from our dad. We stayed in Dumfries and in loads of different places. It would have been difficult for my mother as I had ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). I was wild and it couldn't have been easy. When I reflect on that, I know I was bad but it was difficult to maintain my balance when I was sinking at school. The local authority knew how difficult my home life was. The first and most expensive thing that my mum ever bought me when I was at home was a Nintendo 64. It was simply so that she didn't have to deal with me. My mum was never maternal.
7. I went to Shortlees Primary School. The headmistress, Jacqui MacLean, was fantastic. She fought to keep me in that school despite my behaviour. I was a difficult child. I was volatile and I had a short temper. I struggled academically because the lessons were boring. Jacqui McLean couldn't have done any more to support me. I had classroom support. At first I was good at school, but things started to deteriorate at home. I think Jacqui knew that my home life was difficult.
8. I refused to wear shorts for PE as my body was covered in bruises from the beatings I had been given by my father. It was hidden from the school until I got a black eye. I don't remember this happening, but I know from my file that after I went to school with a black eye, Jacqui McLean asked me to lift my shirt and I was covered in bruises. I told her that my dad had beaten me. Jacqui McLean contacted social work and they came and interviewed me. The police also came and spoke to me. After this my

dad was evicted from the family home and had a restriction order placed on him not to approach me or my mother.

9. Social work were involved with me right from the start, since I was a baby. I think that before I had reported what had happened to me with my father the local authority had been aware of what was happening. After my mum left my dad, she was frightened that the social work would take us from her. Things were better for a while when my dad left, but then my mum fell off the wagon and things spiralled. She met a lot of other boyfriends, who were very much like my dad and the family fell apart again.
10. My recollection of the social work was that they were very hands on. They would be at our house every week. I don't think that my mum could cope with three wild boys. She might have been equipped to cope with one, maybe two, but not three, one of whom had autism and one of whom had ADHD. There were holes in the walls and [REDACTED] and I would hit each other with spatulas and golf clubs. I would jump out of the window when she grounded me. She had her hands full. She was sinking.
11. I went to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) and Rainbow House in Irvine when I was pretty young. A doctor at Rainbow House diagnosed me with ADHD. I was medicated when I was about ten, maybe a little younger. I was prescribed Ritalin and it made things worse. My mum would bring it out every morning. To start with, they gave me one tablet and it subdued me a little bit. They increased that to two tablets and I was like a zombie. My eyes would be spinning. I felt awful. I was tired, I was lethargic and it made me despise my mother. I refused to take it. I used to pretend that I was swallowing it or regurgitate it. It was Jacqui McLean who spotted that I was allergic to Ritalin. She realised something wasn't right and she stopped me taking it when I was at school.
12. I think I was in care when I was very young, but I don't remember it. I believe it was possibly foster care or respite carers. I was around six years old the first time that I went into care. They put me in Kilmaurs Children's Home as an emergency placement. I can't remember anybody explaining it to me. I think the family situation had deteriorated so badly that it was done on a whim. Selina Daly was my social worker

when I first went into care. You couldn't have met a nicer person. We also had a family support worker called Elaine Nash. When I was at Kilmaurs initially, they looked at other alternatives and they exhausted everything. They wanted to give me a normal, family life so they tried foster care. They found LAH-LAI I visited them before I went there so we could get a feel for each other. I could see that LAI was two-faced, even then.

Foster care with LAH-LAI

13. I'm not sure how old I was when I went to LAH-LAI, I just remember it was really bad. I think I may already have been in Kilmaurs for a couple of years. I was only there for short time, maybe not even a couple of months. I don't know where they lived, but I think it might have been a place called Kirkcaldy. It was quite far away because I used to get a taxi to school and it was a long drive. When I first went into foster care I was very scared. The door for the house was on the side of the building. It was just an ordinary house but quite big. Mr LAH car was his pride and joy. It was a blue-purple Toyota Corolla.

14. My foster parents, LAH-LAI, were horrible. They were bullies. LAH and LAI were both in their forties. I am sure that LAH was older than LAI. I don't remember them working. I think fostering was their income. I don't think that they had been fostering for long before they took me. They hadn't had a challenging child that came from a background like mine. I don't know how they were approved as foster carers. LAH-LAI had children of their own. They were extremely nasty to me. One of their children was a boy, possibly in his late teens. They also had two other foster kids. The foster kids' room was in the attic of the house. The other foster kids were as good as gold. I don't know whether they were scared of LAH and LAI

Routine at the LAH-LAI

Mornings and bedtime

15. For the first few weeks I had a room of my own, then I had to share when another boy arrived. I think his name was [REDACTED], but I'm not sure. The room was quite small. We slept in bunk beds. I didn't like [REDACTED] I didn't put any posters or anything up in my room because I had no intention of staying there any longer than necessary.

Trips and holidays

16. I was never taken out for trips or holidays. I have no nice memories of being with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

School

17. I was still going to Shortlees Primary School. I had to get a taxi to school. This would take about an hour. I remember the taxi driver, who was lovely. I used to dread going back to the foster home after school.

Visits/Inspections

18. There was no contact with social work when I was in foster care. I don't think [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] allowed it in case I told the social worker what was going on. There was a contact person, Paul, who would liaise between my foster parents and the social work. [REDACTED] didn't want me in the room when he was in the house because they didn't want their horror exposed. I burst into the room and I told him that if I wasn't moved I would put a brick through [REDACTED]'s car window. When I wasn't moved this is exactly what I did. Paul was there when I did it. [REDACTED] chased me down the road but he was never going to catch me as he was about 25 stone.

Family contact

19. I would be taken to a contact location, not far from the foster home, when I had a visit from my mother. It was a trailer, a little cabin. The room was quite small. On one occasion, just before Christmas, I met my mother. She got me some nice presents

and I got to open them early. LAH and LAI ridiculed me for this. They would bully me for almost anything. They were mean and they enjoyed it. It wasn't nice and I felt like I was being bullied by them. I was always singled out by them. They wouldn't do the same to the other kids.

Abuse at the LAH-LAI

20. LAH was cruel and he took great pleasure in being cruel. I was bullied by LAH-LAI LAH-LAI I was singled out for whatever reason. They stripped my room of every present that my mother bought me. They hid them under their bed. I kicked open their door and practically destroyed their house so they had no other option but to have me moved.

Reporting of abuse at the LAH-LAI

21. Paul was a liaison between social work and LAH-LAI He was an older man. I told Paul, the contact person, what was happening to me but nothing ever done about it.

Leaving foster care

22. I knew that LAH and LAI wouldn't be able to cope with me if the children's unit couldn't cope with me. They lived in a nice area. After I put the brick through LAH's car window they told social work that they were giving 28 days' notice for me to be moved. I had never heard of this happening before. LAH and LAI basically blackmailed the social work into moving me by saying they would stop fostering if I wasn't moved. I left within 24 hours. I was placed into temporary foster care.

Unknown emergency foster care

23. I think LAH-LAI gave 28 days' notice that they were stopping fostering altogether. One of the other children at LAH-LAI moved with me to emergency foster care. I don't know how old I was but she was about six. She was a lovely little girl, very quiet and shy. I don't remember her name. I don't know where the emergency foster placement was, but the foster father was a nasty man. I would say that he was worse than LAH. He had two sons who were also stuck up. They were treated differently than the foster kids. They had a Playstation and we weren't allowed to play on it.
24. The foster mother was okay. She was quite nice. The foster father was hideous. He never hurt me, but he was very verbally aggressive and shouty. I don't know if he was ex-police or ex-military, but he was very hostile and everything he said had to be done right then and there. I think his wife was a little afraid of him.
25. There was a room in the house divided by glass doors. It's the only part of the house that sticks in my memory. The little girl was playing with Duplo. We used to enjoy playing and spending time together. I really wanted to play with her, but I was kept separate. I think LAH or LAI had made them aware that I was a troublemaker so they used to segregate us. I never stepped out of line there. The foster father would threaten me with the police station, which was across the road.
26. I honestly don't know how long I was in that placement for. I was taken back to Kilmaurs afterwards because the local authority had nowhere else for me to go. I was put into a tiny bedroom at the back, which was used in emergencies. When I was moved between foster placements and Kilmaurs, I would be fired into the back of a social worker's car or the unit's minibus. My stuff would be in black bags. That was soul destroying.

Kilmaurs Children's Home, Kilmarnock

27. I think I was quite young when I went to Kilmaurs, maybe about six or seven years old. They couldn't put me anywhere else. They tried foster care when I was in Kilmaurs, but that didn't work so I was taken back.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Respite care

47. I would go for respite care on a Friday night. It started when I was at home with my mum and I needed it. My mum couldn't handle three boys in the house. I stayed with [REDACTED] who stayed in Cumnock. She was the only foster carer who would take me. [REDACTED] had three daughters of her home. I liked going there. I felt that I was part of the family. I still see [REDACTED] and her daughters. She gave me the taste of being in a normal family. I would stay there from Friday to Sunday. This went on for a long time whilst I was in Kilmaurs. It was one of the best thing that Ayrshire Council did for me.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Leaving Kilmaurs

74. I was supposed to go to Grange Academy in Kilmarnock, which is a normal, standard secondary school. The social work department said they were going to keep me in Kilmarnock and they would try normal, mainstream schooling. I can't remember what age I was exactly but I must have been around the age for secondary school. I went for a visit and absolutely loved it. I thought this would be really good for me and a chance for a new start. It would give me a chance to make new friends. I was going to go to the Grange and things were going to be different. Most local schools wouldn't

touch me because of my record. Jacqui McLean fought for Grange Academy to accept me and they were going to do so grudgingly.

75. Instead of Grange Academy, East Ayrshire Council decided to send me three hundred miles away. I tried everything. I promised them everything in reviews and Children's Panels, but they wouldn't budge. They didn't want to put me anywhere local because I used to run away. I thought that the more difficult I became, the more care I would demand. Unfortunately, that led me to Oakbank. I had started to self-destruct so other measures were put in place. I was told that Oakbank was the last resort before a secure unit. It was the only place that would take me because of my file.
76. When I finished primary school, they shipped me off to Oakbank. I fought against it every step of the way. Before I went there, LAJ [REDACTED] and Joe Loosley came down from Oakbank to observe me at Kilmaurs. They didn't really talk to me. I was in one part of the room and they were in another part together, observing me. LAJ [REDACTED] was very intimidating, even when she didn't say anything. I went on a visit to Oakbank shortly before I went there. I went in the school mini bus. When I went to see it, I was terrified. It was huge. I remember driving through the gates and it looked like an old, haunted castle. There was so much of it that it was a lot to process. I hated it. I ran away the morning they were supposed to escort me to Aberdeen.

Oakbank Residential School, Aberdeen

77. My memory is a little bit rusty with ages. I know I was still quite young when I went to Oakbank. I think it was maybe [REDACTED] 2004. It was just as I was due to go to secondary school. Oakbank was off a main road in Aberdeen, Mid Stocket Road. It had a massive driveway, which ran right the way through the school. There was a fountain at the front, like one of those posh schools. The main building housed the canteen, management offices, the principal's office and the reception. All the school cars were kept outside it. SNR [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] of the school. [REDACTED] name was [REDACTED].

78. Oakbank had its own built-in school. It had a swimming pool, a multi-gym, a laundry, a gym hall and a music room in one facility with inter-linking doors. There was the techy block for home economics classes, art classes, English and woodwork. It had mini-buses, cars and a massive canteen. There was a garage where they fixed cars, where we were taught mechanics as part of the school. We had our own football field and our own Olympic size swimming pool. There were inter unit football and softball matches, which were messy.
79. Oakbank was absolutely huge. It had everything. The building was so big that if you stood on the second floor, you could see right the way out to the sea. It was like an empire. It had thirteen buildings. It employed four thousand members of staff and had about three hundred children, ranging from six to sixteen years old. Some kids were kept on until they were eighteen. Most units took seven children, but Clover could take fourteen at maximum capacity. Ythan took six but it could take eight at a push. Oakhill was the biggest unit. It had nineteen children but it could take 24. There were about three hundred kids in total. It functioned like an independent community.
80. There were seven independent units that functioned as their own houses. You were very well catered for at Oakbank. The units were named after rivers. There was Ythan, Esk, Dee, Clover, Ashgrove, Rosemount and Oakhill. There was also Central Wing, which was a specialised and secure facility. It was scary. Esk unit was for children who had some disabilities. Esk was interlinked with Oakhill, which was for kids reaching the end of care, aged fifteen, sixteen. They didn't require close support so there were about three staff to fifteen kids. Ythan sat in the corner and kind of ran independently, but it was connected by a door to Oakhill. There was a portacabin, which had been a temporary measure that became permanent. It was called Clover and it was an all-girls unit. All the other units were for boys, except for Rosemount which was mixed. The kids at Rosemount went to mainstream school. The boys at Ashgrove also went to mainstream school. Dee was for younger kids. It wasn't great for them because most of the kids at Oakbank were secondary school age.
81. I was in Ythan. LAJ [REDACTED] was in charge of my unit. She isn't somebody I'd hire to put in charge of a children's unit. There were six children and six staff members.

You had a staff member shackled to you 24 hours, seven days a week. Everywhere you went, you were shadowed by a member of staff. Ythan was very intense. You could work towards being in Oakhill, where there was less supervision. Oakhill was low support, low risk and low effort. That was everybody's goal, to be there. I got transferred to Oakhill after LAJ left. Oakhill was a big, flat-roofed unit. It had its own laundry room, three living rooms, the pool room, the staff office, the toilets, the quiet room, a massive dining room and a massive kitchen. The bedrooms were huge. There were great facilities at Oakbank, but it was poorly ran.

Routine at Oakbank

Mornings and bedtime

82. Bill Cooper worked nightshift at Ythen. He was a legend and one of the best nightshift workers I ever had. I used to sit up until 3, 4:00 am because I couldn't sleep. Bill would tell me I could go and watch TV, just as long as I made sure I was back in my bed for the early shift coming in.

Leisure time

83. There were different grades of trust. You could leave Ythen without a staff member but you had to bend the rules a little and be creative.

School

84. We called the teachers by their first names. Everybody loved the home economics teacher, Irene. She was a sweetheart. The woodwork teacher was called EJW. EJW He'd been at Oakbank for decades. In all the years EJW and Irene had been at the school, there had never been an incident in their classrooms. EJW was married to SNR. She was lovely as well.

85. The school catered for children with behavioural difficulties. There were very small classes of four or six children. You were assigned a member of staff for the day. The staff hated being in the lessons and they had no idea what they were doing in most subjects. You'd see them congregating out in the corridor, talking to each other. You'd hear them laughing and joking. If a teacher gave you something difficult, you could ask the staff member to come in and give you a hand, but other than that they just left you to it. I wanted to be a doctor. Oakbank and Seafield didn't cater for that kind of child. The curriculum wasn't great. They had fully qualified teachers in each subject, but trying to teach kids with behavioural difficulties English or maths while two kids from a different unit are arguing can be challenging.
86. I was a good painter. [REDACTED] commissioned me to do two paintings for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] still has them. The art teacher was called Dave, but when he left he was never replaced. We weren't really encouraged to follow our passions.
87. The techy block was fuelled by a paraffin tank. It ran out of fuel one cold, harsh Aberdeen winter. There was no power or heating.

Visits/Inspections

88. I didn't have any contact with my family when I was at Oakbank. My social worker at the time was Beth McLean. She came to visit me once in a blue moon. It was twice a year. She didn't care. She thought she was too good to be a social worker. I was spoken to by the Care Commission when they came to interview the kids. I told them it as it was. Oakbank was not a safe facility and [LAJ] [REDACTED] was not a manager that I would hire.

Healthcare

89. When I burst my nose during a restraint, I was given medical treatment at the school. They didn't take me to hospital because they had to fill out loads of paperwork and document that I had been involved in an incident. I was treated by a staff member trained in first aid. The staff member knew how it had happened, but didn't ask. I can't

remember which staff member it was. The vast majority of incidents dealt with by first aiders followed restraints. I was taken to the hospital when I injured my knee in a restraint and chipped the bone, but the staff lied to the hospital about how I had come about the injury. They told the staff at the hospital that I had fallen off a motorbike.

Running away

90. I absconded in my first week. I was terrified of Oakbank. There was a boy in Ythen called GGC. I believe he's dead now. I don't know why GGC was in care. He was the most sweet natured and placid person I've ever met. He became friends with me as soon as I arrived. I don't know whether it was my first or second night in Oakbank, but I ran away to GGC mum's house. His mum was lovely. She brought us out of the cold. She phoned Ythen and Bill Cooper, who was on nightshift, came to get me. He brought me back in the school car a couple of hours after I'd absconded.

Relationship with staff/support

91. There was no emotional support or treatment at Oakbank. It was a last stop shop to a secure placement. LAJ was in charge of my unit. She had been in the police. A lot of people loved her, but I never understood why. In all the years that I was at Oakbank, LAJ would never get involved in a restraint. She'd always be there, micro-managing, when two staff members were restraining a child. She liked to interfere and make herself seem important. She was particularly nasty to the kids. She was always shouting at kids, giving them a hard time and accusing them of things. She was just a bitch in general, the type of woman who had never seen fun in her life. She was not a nice person to be around.
92. We were all given hamsters. I'd never seen a hamster before, let alone handle one. I was given a cage, food and bedding and told it was nocturnal, that was it. I loved the hamster a little too much. Unfortunately, the hamster didn't survive. I didn't know that hamsters were so fragile and I tried to hug it. I had only been in Oakbank for a few days. I panicked because I was new and I didn't want people to think that I was a killer. I told people it must be sleeping. LAJ was particularly cruel to me about it. She was

nice when other people were around, but she used to pull you into her office and she would be quite horrible. She accused me of doing it to the hamster deliberately and then concealing it. It had been a genuine accident.

93. Wayne Martin was my key worker in Ythen. He was legendary. Some of the staff were great, but some of them weren't. Some of the staff who used to shadow us in Ythen thought we were bad children. They would ram it down your throat. They had a sheet of paper, split into boxes. It had the kid's name and the staff member's name. There would be an extra box at the side for school, meetings, reviews or hearings.

94. About a year before Oakbank closed down, it got to the point that the kids had had enough. The straw that broke the camel's back was when one of the kids went up on the roof and threatened to jump off because he couldn't cope. I can't remember his name. Up until that point, I very rarely got to speak to [REDACTED], SNR [REDACTED] of the school. The staff kept kids away from [REDACTED] as much as possible. There were ways to get to speak to [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] still had to park [REDACTED] car. When things were kicking off and the old guard were fired, all the kids surrounded [REDACTED] Bentley to demand a meeting. The staff couldn't do anything about it. [REDACTED] looked terrified. We took [REDACTED] into [REDACTED] office and told [REDACTED] what had been happening. There were about thirty of us in that room. [REDACTED] hadn't known the half of what was going on. [REDACTED] asked to see every manager. The staff then went on strike. [REDACTED] had to go on the floor as a staff member for the day. [REDACTED] knew what [REDACTED] was doing because [REDACTED] had been a [REDACTED] teacher before [REDACTED] became SNR [REDACTED].

95. [REDACTED] went into the living room of every unit with a notepad. [REDACTED] asked kids to tell [REDACTED] their grievances. One child from every unit was selected to speak for that unit. I was chosen from my unit. I got to know [REDACTED] really well. [REDACTED] cared. [REDACTED] had pages of complaints all over [REDACTED] desk from every kid. [REDACTED] said [REDACTED] was going to change things and the staff would no longer keep [REDACTED] away from the children. [REDACTED] asked for every file and report from every unit. [REDACTED] told staff that if there were inconsistencies, they would have to find another job. Seven staff members resigned within twenty minutes.

96. ██████ took action quickly. ██████ got rid of staff and replaced them overnight. We had a batch of new agency staff within 24 hours. When LAJ ██████ LAK ██████ and the other member of staff were fired, the old guard fell. They didn't fire a lot of them. They made them reapply for their jobs and they didn't get them back. ██████ did all the hiring and firing after that and interviewed every new member of staff. It was very effective and Oakbank ran very differently, but it was too late by then.
97. When LAJ ██████ was fired, she was replaced by a guy called Stuart McKenzie. He drove a motorbike and he was cool. His approach was very different from LAJ ██████ LAJ ██████ was very shouty, Stuart would say, "If you want to break a window, break it. It'll be you that suffers when the living room's cold. I've got a fan heater in the office so I'll be nice and toasty." That was very much his philosophy. He was very chilled. He would shout on you to get him a coffee if you walked past his office and ask you to sit down for a chat. He would ask you how things were going at school and whether anything was bothering you in the unit. The building was falling apart and he squeezed every penny out of ██████ that he could. He painted and re-carpeted the whole unit. He replaced the windows with double glazing.
98. Behaviour radically changed in the unit after Stuart McKenzie took over. He wasn't shouting at people and barking orders at his staff. There was more money in the petty cash for activities. He really turned Oakhill unit around completely 350 degrees. If two boys got into a fight, he would sit them down at opposite ends of the room and ask them what had happened. There were no restraints.

Discipline/restraints

99. There was a boy who went to school with me called ██████. His mum was deaf. I made a snide remark about something to him. LAJ ██████ made me turn the volume down on my TV and live as if I was deaf. That was the type of punishment she liked.
100. There was a PIT (Personal Infrared Transmission) security and safety system at Oakbank. They're used by emergency services and things like that. The staff had a PIT pager, which was a black cylinder. They were signed out from a wall at the

reception at the start of every shift. There was a black, infrared box in every room, two in big rooms. It was a clever system. The PIT was attached to the staff member's belt. If an issue arose, the staff member could push a button on the PIT and it was like a silent alarm. It would go to the duty manager's pager. There would always be a designated staff member in every unit and every manager would carry a pager. It would tell them where assistance was needed. If things got very serious, the staff member could pull a pin out the top of the PIT and it was classed as an emergency. It was mandatory that every staff member attend.

101. I was really difficult because I didn't want to be at Oakbank. I was restrained on average three times a week. There were staff at Oakbank who loved to use restraint. They lived for a restraint. I witnessed them instigate an argument with a child for them to bite. Before you knew it, there was a restraint. They loved it. They used restraints so much and they were so heavy-handed. De-escalation didn't happen. Their de-escalation was a quiet room, which was something to be feared. The quiet rooms were a mean weapon. There was one in every unit and in every vicinity. You couldn't go anywhere in any of the buildings without a quiet room being nearby. It was a room a little bigger than a broom closet with a sofa, a telephone and a file. How long you were in the room for was discretionary, but they loved using that room.

102. The staff used Calms techniques when they were restraining children. If a figure of four was being used, there would be a staff member on either side of you. They'd put their arm through your arm and hold you down. They needed more staff members for bigger children. If you were restrained, the staff filled out a pinky purple form called a T40 form. They filled it out by hand. On the front of the form, the restraints had different numbers and a box would be ticked next to the type used. There was a box at the back of the form for the staff to say what happened. The box wasn't very big and they couldn't give intricate detail. The staff would sugar coat what had happened and leave details out that they thought they might get their knuckles wrapped for. Some staff ended up with black eyes, burst noses and broken jaws. Sometimes a kid would end up with a split head or a burst lip. That would be omitted from the report because it would make the staff look bad. Every time a restraint was used, it was supposed to be supervised but that never happened.

103. The quiet rooms, the restraints and PIT were threats used to control the kids. If you disagreed with a staff member, they would threaten to push their PIT. I would tell them to go for it and get some other staff in to see what they were doing. When Stuart McKenzie took over from LAJ the use of restraints rapidly dropped in Oakhill. There was a blackboard in the pool room that would record the number of restraints that had been used that month. On average, there used to be over two hundred restraints every month, just in Oakhill unit alone. I dread to think what the number was for the whole school. Apparently, the number of restraints used in Oakbank School were the highest in the UK, even higher than a secure prison. That changed when the old guard fell. In the six months that Stuart McKenzie was in charge of the unit, I think there were thirteen restraints in total.

Abuse at Oakbank

104. I never saw LAJ hit a child directly. I saw her in the background, shouting and being abusive. She would egg other staff members on. She had a temper. It wouldn't have surprised me at all if she had raised her hand to a child. She was very volatile and angry. Restraints were used frequently when she was in charge. I would often walk past in the corridor and see a swarm of staff. I would hear the shouting, screaming and the swearing and the punching and the kicking when someone was being restrained. I remember a boy called being restrained in the quiet room. I can't remember his second name. There was wire mesh glass on the door and the staff smacked his head off it. The glass cracked and I saw the blood shoot out of his head and splat across the window. I don't know which staff were involved because I could only see LAJ. He was a big guy, six feet tall. I heard the echo through the corridor when the glass cracked.
105. I experienced several really bad restraints when I was in Ythen. The staff denied it. The morning after I absconded with GGC, I was woken up at 8:00 am and there were all sorts of accusations. I was forced to get dressed and taken to the quiet room. There was nothing in it. It was all white and very sterile. It smelled heavily of bleach. There was something not right about it. LAJ office was across from the quiet room.

She went off on one. She didn't care why I'd ran away, she just wanted to shout at somebody.

106. I wasn't allowed to leave the quiet room. There were two staff members present at all times. I was like a prisoner, held captive in that room. I couldn't go to the toilet. I wanted to leave and they wouldn't let me leave. I kicked off because they wouldn't let me go to the toilet. I ended up in a restraint and they damaged my leg. I don't know the names of the staff members involved in that restraint because it was my first week at Oakbank. I had to go to the hospital for an x-ray. I was taken by a member of staff called Jenna. I remember she took me because she believed my account of what happened. She was too afraid to do anything about it because she was new and had only been in the job for a few months.
107. I was in agony for a week, but the staff denied any wrong doing. I wasn't aware of the story that the staff had concocted at the time, but they told the hospital that I'd fallen off a motorbike. They also informed my social worker, Beth McLean, and management that was what had happened. Nobody ever heard my side of the story. They didn't care.
108. I also ended up with a burst nose after a restraint. I got into a fight with another boy. I can't remember which staff member was involved, but I was restrained at the top of the stairs. It was dangerous. I hit my head on the top of the stairs and burst my nose. I told the staff member that I was bleeding and they still held me face down in the floor in my own blood. I told him that I was drowning in my own blood and he told me to drown quietly.
109. One of my good friends, [REDACTED], died recently. I believe that she applied to give evidence to the Inquiry but I don't know whether she went ahead with it. Her collar bone was broken in a restraint at Oakbank. Police were involved and [REDACTED] had to go to hospital. The staff denied it and there was an investigation. The police didn't do anything about it. Who were they going to believe? A kid in care or a staff member? The police didn't care. I believe that [REDACTED] was moved to a different unit and the staff member was transferred to a different unit as well.

110. While I was at Oakbank, [LAJ] was suspended for hitting children. I was part of the inquiry, but I didn't see it happen. Several children had been involved over a couple of years. There were several reports about her. Several other staff members were also suspended, including [LAK]. I read online that one of the reasons [LAK] [LAK] was suspended was that he was responsible for breaking [] clavicle, but I don't know that for sure and didn't witness that happen. I did feel sorry for [LAJ]. The way that she was fired was cruel. They did it in front of all the kids and staff in the assembly. They made an example out of them.

Reporting of abuse at Oakbank

111. After my knee was injured in a restraint, the staff denied it. The report on what happened is absolute rubbish. It said that I chipped my knee bone because I fell off a motorbike when I absconded. I've never been on a motorbike in my life. Where was [GGC] going to get a motorbike? He was thirteen years old. There was no other damage, other than a bruise on my leg and a chipped knee bone. If I had fallen off a motorbike, I would have been covered in grazes all over my body.
112. There were budget cuts across the board. Places like Oakbank were becoming surplus to requirements and local authorities didn't want to fund places like that. Staff were terrified for their jobs so they had each other's backs. Kids would witness what had happened and tell another manager. The manager would say that they would look into it, but it never happened. No staff were ever reprimanded. The only thing that happened was when [LAJ], [LAK] and another member of staff were sacked. When the old guard were in charge at Oakbank, there wasn't a chance that you could report a grievance. The staff would make sure that you couldn't see the principal.
113. When [LAJ] was sacked by Oakbank, I was spoken to by the Aberdeen police as part of the investigation. We were selected at random. Before I was spoken to, [LAJ] must have found out that I was being interviewed. She was nice to me. She had never been nice to me before. The police just asked me what I had seen. I don't know the ins and outs of what happened, but I told them it wouldn't surprise me if she had done it in a

restraint. I told them that she was very angry towards every individual child and very cruel.

114. When LAJ, LAK and the other staff member were sacked, there was a huge shake up. They made other members of staff reapply for their jobs and lots of them didn't get them. That was a scary time because the kids were told that Oakbank might face closure due to the controversy. The investigation and the news were Oakbank's downfall. Local authorities were terrified to send kids there so the numbers started to dwindle. It was losing its funding and then eventually, without warning, it closed.

Leaving Oakbank

115. I was at Oakbank for about four years altogether. I flourished at Oakbank. It was a fantastic place. I had a fair whack of bad experiences at Oakbank, but it broke my heart when they closed it. I was one of the last kids to leave Oakbank in 2008. I wouldn't leave. I think Oakbank closed before its time. Things had been changing for the better.
116. Oakbank had come under tough times. There was management and staff restructuring and a fair few units had been closed. There were voluntary redundancies. Staff started to leave in bulk. A young person from each unit was asked to represent each unit in front of the board. Yvonne Allan was the chairwoman of the trustees. She was a local councillor. I told them I was one year from leaving school and asked them what I was supposed to do? I asked them to keep the school open until I left school and they basically said no. I was so unimpressed by their lack of care or emotion. To them, Oakbank was just dollars and pounds and that was how they treated it.
117. I took the longest to place because of my file. I fought them every step of the way. They only kept Oakhill unit open because I was still in it. There were six staff members remaining on the roster, two for early, two for backshift and two for nightshift. There were also two staff members in the office who were digitalising the files. Lynn and Jacqui. It was scary because it had gone from three hundred children and four

thousand staff to me being the only one walking through the school. It was a very different feeling. It was harrowing.

118. My heart broke when they told me that Oakbank was closing because I knew that East Ayrshire Council wouldn't keep me in the Aberdeen area. I also knew of some of the facilities in Ayrshire where they might send me. I was told I was going to Seafield one day and I was there the next. I was taken by Stuart McKenzie in the Oakbank School car. I had never been there before, but I had been shown it online. Nothing was done to settle me in to Seafield. I was dropped off and that was it.

Seafield School, Ardrossan

119. I'm not sure how old I was when I went to Seafield, but I was maybe around fourteen. Seafield School was a big pink castle in Ardrossan. It stood by itself, surrounded by land, with nothing on either side of it. You could spot it a mile away. The main road was in front of it and then there was the beach. The school was run by Quarriers. Alison Gough was in overall charge. She was the head of service. I believe her predecessor had walked out and they couldn't find a replacement for a while. They then gave the job to Alison Gough, but she had no experience of doing anything like that before. David Hutton was the head of childcare and Julian Barr was the head of education.
120. The staffing ratio was very poor at Seafield. There wasn't close support, like there had been at Oakbank. There were three, four members of staff to twelve, thirteen kids. They didn't have a PIT system. Eddie Jones was the unit manager of Bute, the unit that I was in. There were three units, Bute, Arran and Clyde. There were seven children in Bute. [REDACTED] lived in Bute, but he went to full-time, mainstream education and didn't attend the school at Seafield. The age range of the kids was six to sixteen. Clyde was for the younger boys, aged six to nine. It was a little bit bigger than Bute. Arran was for older boys. There were very few boys in Arran because they tended to go out to their friends and family.

121. There was also another unit in Largs called Merton It was a satellite unit, but it was still part of Seafield. If you lived there, you still came to Seafield for school and they would drive you every morning. It was out in the community, on the seafront. It was for young people who were getting ready to leave.

Routine at Seafield

First day

122. When I arrived at Seafield, I was just dropped off by Stuart McKenzie. I was met by Eddie Jones. I learned that he has now passed away. He was not a nice man to me at all. Going to Seafield was a very difficult transition. It ran nothing like Oakbank. There were new staff, new kids and I had to build relationships all over again. I was older and I knew that I was gay. The staff didn't like that.

Bedrooms

123. The bedrooms were all standard. They were very basic and rudimentary. We had a bed, a phone, a ladder and underneath the bed was a desk with your computer and TV. They didn't have the budget for us to personalise our rooms.

Mealtimes/food

124. We ate in our units, but we all ate at the same time. The food was cooked in the main kitchen. It was brought up to the unit via the lift on hot trolleys. We all ate in the canteen when we were at school. The food wasn't great. Hospital food would be better. There was no choice, so if you didn't like the food you went without or you got a yoghurt. There was a locked cupboard which had our own plastic boxes with snacks in them.

School

125. In some respects, Seafield was better than Oakbank. It fell short on education. My education was horrendous. There was no education at Seafield. It was very limited. The staff worked with what they had. The only decent subject was maths. The maths teacher was Mike Hicks. We were supposed to call the teachers by their second names at Seafield, but everybody just called them by their first names. Mr Hicks had been at Seafield for a long time and there was nothing he hadn't seen. He was such a good teacher. Everybody called him Hicksy.
126. Julian Barr was the head of education and Dawn Hodgkins was the deputy head. Dawn got fired after I had been there for a couple of weeks. I was devastated because I had had a long conversation with her about my aspirations and what I wanted. Nobody ever knew why she left and it was concealed from everybody. She was replaced by Elaine Mackintosh. I got on very well with Elaine. She was very bubbly.
127. Julian Barr was involved in a mountain biking accident and didn't come back so Elaine took over. Elaine and QMH had a meeting with me. Elaine asked me what exactly I wanted to do in life. I told them that I wanted to be a surgeon. They looked at each other, they looked at me and they said, "That's not the type of education we offer here." They actually used the words, "Dream smaller." If I couldn't be a doctor, I wanted to be an engineer but they didn't cater for that either. I couldn't get to mainstream school because they wouldn't risk it. That was it, I had to give up on my dreams.
128. They chose not to provide external exams at Seafield. I did get to do my intermediate 1 in English with a scribe and I did maths and computing. I got a C in English and maths and an A+ in computing. It was made every clear to me that I was never going to be a surgeon and I was never going to be an engineer. It was soul destroying because I knew that I had potential. I wanted to be doctor so that I could help people.

Leisure time/trips

129. They had a custom built, brand new gym hall. We had the beach nearby. Security wasn't as tight at Seafield as it was at Oakbank. You could come and go as you pleased. The front door had a magnetic lock with a code, but all the kids knew the code. We got pocket money and we had a clothing allowance and things like that.
130. There were cars available at Seafield so we had some really fun trips. We went to Blair Drummond Safari Park. We went to the cinema, swimming and bowling. We went sailing, which I found terrifying because I don't do well on water. We didn't go on holidays.

Visits/Inspections

131. I didn't have any contact with my family when I was at Seafield. My social worker by that time was Elaine. She had two white Alsatians, who would sit in the back of her Jeep when she came to visit every week. She would take me out every week. I loved her. I had regular contact with her. By the time I was moved to Merton, my social worker was Craig Ross. He didn't care about me.

Relationship with staff/support

132. Eddie was very much like [LAJ] at Oakbank. All the kids were afraid of him. I was very bright and I wasn't afraid of Eddie. He was nothing compared to [LAJ] and she had been sacked. I was switched on and I knew what my rights were. I would tell him that he couldn't do something legally and he would say that he could. I would say, "Fine, do it. I'm going to phone my social worker." Eddie gave me a hard time for nothing. It was the way that he spoke to me and the way that he treated me. I was a very relaxed kid in Seafield and I never gave the staff any grief. Eddie had it in for me and I don't know why.
133. I knew that I was gay, but I hadn't come out to anybody. It was a different time. I was in a new school and I was building new relationships. I had new key workers and

things. It inadvertently came out to one of the other kids that I was gay. I think he guessed. He told my key worker, Stephen Gemmell. I was huckled into the office by Eddie Jones and Stephen and told never to discuss my sexuality again. They were very homophobic. There was no reason given and no offer of support.

134. A couple of months went by and I went toe to toe with Eddie. Every day, I told him to do his worst. I would say, "There's my computer, there's my TV. Take them." Eddie thought that he was untouchable. He had a really negative way about him. I was a little afraid of him. I got the feeling that he wouldn't be afraid to hit a child, although I never saw him do that.
135. As well as the residential kids, there were kids who came from home to go to school. The role of pastoral support was to support those kids. I was allocated Senga Crichton from pastoral support because I didn't want to be at Seafield. I was moved from Bute to Arran unit. They said that I had an inappropriate relationship with one of the boys in Bute, which was untrue. After I had been restrained, I was put in the medical room when I had a carpet burn on my face. They didn't have a nurse so I didn't get any treatment. Senga from pastoral support was there. I remember that very well. She was one of the first people I had come out to. She was really supportive.
136. Eventually, I was moved out of the school altogether. They wanted me out in Merton after they had accused me of sleeping with the boy in Bute. It wasn't to help me prepare for leaving. There was no real help for leaving. I was given a through-care worker. The worker wanted to help, but I was a fifteen year old kid who had known care all my life. I didn't want to go. I was deliberately very bad at Merton because I thought the worse I was, the more likely they were to keep me. In the end, it sped up the process of them kicking me out.

Discipline/restraints

137. Seafield used something called Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI). It was developed in America, but it's now illegal there. It was anything but therapeutic. It was developed to restrain prisoners in places that were like psychiatric institutions. In all my years in

care, I have never seen anything like it. It was dangerous and it should be banned. It's one of the most dangerous restraint methods that any local authority has authorised. Not only is it dangerous to the kids, it's lethal to the staff. There have been umpteen occasions where TCI has been used and staff ended up with broken ribs and collar bones and children have ended up with black eyes and split heads. It should never ever have made it to the care sector.

138. There was a handbook containing several different methods for TCI. They were all given codes. I remember one which I think had the code T28. The child would be face down and a staff member would be holding the legs and another staff member holding the arms. There were kids getting carpet burns which then got infected, kids splitting their heads open. They were carried out in inappropriate places, like next to radiators. Lots of kids ended up needing treatment at hospital. Calms wasn't great but it was better than TCI. TCI was taught by other staff whereas Calms had external individual specialists come in to train staff. In my opinion, if TCI is still being used it would not surprise me if they've lost a child or a staff member in a residential facility because of its use. It was extremely dangerous. It was unpoliced and unmonitored.
139. I remember one child was black and blue because of TCI. It was never that bad at Oakbank. TCI was used and it was used as a threat, "Behave or you'll get TCI. Behave or you'll get a restraint." They used to swipe your legs from under you. That happened to me once. I ended up with a carpet burn on my face. My memory is a bit hazy, but it was in front of the day unit, outside the teachers' lounge. I can't remember which staff were involved. Eddie had made a remark about me being gay and I snapped. I don't remember exactly what he said.
140. There was a door between the day unit and the duty manager's office. It had a Yale lock so I couldn't get to Eddie because the door had been shut too quickly. The door had been kicked off its hinges several times before I got to Seafield. To stop that happening, there was a metal sheet in between the door and a metal cover over the lock to stop it being prised open. I kicked the reinforced steel door. I then ripped a fire extinguisher and started rattling it off the door. Karen Chianto was the deputy unit

manager. She came round the corner. I told her not to come through the door. Eddie hid in the duty manager's office all day.

141. LAL [REDACTED] was pastoral support. He restrained me, along with another member of staff who I can't remember. LAL [REDACTED] was about seven foot tall. TCI was very violent. They swiped your legs and floored you. It didn't matter how quickly they did it, you always ended up getting hurt when you hit the floor.
142. Restraints happened often at Seafield, especially with the day unit kids. Some of them became residential kids. Seafield housed a lot of kids that no other units would touch. Norma Patrick was a residential childcare worker, but she was senior so she oversaw over staff when she was on shift. Norma was in her late fifties. She was attacked by six boys in the middle of a restraint. A group of kids pulled the other kids off Norma and saved her life. [REDACTED] who I am friends with on Facebook, was very close to Norma. He attacked one of the boys who did that and the boy had to be hospitalised.

Abuse at Seafield

143. A staff member threw a kid down the stairs when I was at Seafield. The child's name was [REDACTED] and he was thirteen, fourteen. Numbers were dwindling at Seafield. The local authorities didn't want to place kids there. It cost £200,000 a year, which was a lot of money. It wasn't just me who witnessed it. A social worker saw it as well. The fire alarm was going off. [REDACTED] was at the top of the stairs and he wouldn't leave. The staff member was QMX [REDACTED], who was SNR [REDACTED]. He threw or pushed [REDACTED] down the stairs and I saw it happen, but I don't know whether it was malicious. [REDACTED] told his friends he wasn't supposed to discuss what happened. We didn't see him for a while after that incident, but I later became aware he broke his arm.

Reporting of abuse at Seafield

144. There was an investigation when [REDACTED] broke his arm. I think the police were involved, but I was never asked to give a statement. QMX [REDACTED] was suspended, although we were all told that he was on holiday. He was then struck off and he [REDACTED] Seafield. QMX [REDACTED] was [REDACTED]. They said that he was doing what was necessary to get a child out of the building in an emergency. Although the member of staff physically removed [REDACTED] from the building by throwing him down the stairs, it was found that QMX [REDACTED] had lost his grip whilst struggling with [REDACTED] on the stairs. The social worker and everybody had seen it happen, but Seafield were renowned for hiding incidents. Two days after the incident the Care Commission were coming in to inspect Seafield. I was told by Eddie Jones that I wasn't allowed to speak to the Care Commission.

Leaving Seafield

145. I was at Seafield for about two years, including being in Merton House. When I left care, I was afraid of being on my own. I had been dumped in a flat on my own by the council. The Children's Panel cancelled my Supervision Order. They moved me from Merton the night of the Panel. They knew that if I went back to Merton then I wouldn't leave so they dumped me in a flat with nothing.
146. My flat was in Newmilns, which was a village in the middle of nowhere. I had spent all my life being surrounded by kids and staff. I went from that to being alone in a two bedroomed flat with virtually nothing in it. I didn't know the neighbours and I didn't even know how to pay a bill. I didn't know how to cook. I'd spent my whole life having food catered for me. I was given a Throughcare allowance. I just sat and watched Judge Judy and Midsomer Murders all day. I had just turned sixteen. I had a Throughcare worker, Jim Walker, who I saw once a week. He would take me out shopping. He kept me sane. He knew that I'd had a really rough deal from the Children's Panel.

147. I contacted a solicitor called Angela McCracken of Levy McCrae and took East Ayrshire Council to court. The council had no choice but to settle at Ayr Sheriff Court. [REDACTED] Because of that, I got a new social worker reinstated and I got more money. My social worker was Wendy McKeffney. She came to see me twice a week. As a result of the court case, the council moved me to a flat in Kilmarnock. I managed to get a mortgage when I was nineteen and buy the flat. It felt good to win my case. I had a very expensive bottle of champagne and I sent a letter to Susan Taylor, the head of social work, saying, "Better luck next time." I don't know whether she ever got it.

Life after being in care

148. The minute I left care I changed my first name to [REDACTED] LAF I met someone and got married when I was sixteen. I took my husband's surname, which was [REDACTED] I became [REDACTED] LAF [REDACTED] LAF overnight. My first husband was a lot older than me. We didn't click and after a while we divorced amicably. When we divorced, I kept his last name and made it my middle name to further enhance my identity. I chose to bury my past. There are very few people in my life and within my family who are aware that I was in care. Obviously, my mother and father are aware of it. I have concealed it well in a lot of the friendships and relationships that I have built over the years. To those people, I had a normal childhood. I became economical with the truth.
149. The option for support from Throughcare was there right up until the age of 25. I relinquished control when I was twenty. I demanded to be set loose. I made it clear to my social worker and Throughcare worker that if I needed them, I'd phone them. They had more important cases to deal with. I had a full-time job, a husband, the dogs. I didn't need them.
150. When I was eighteen, nineteen I met my second husband in Blackpool. That marriage didn't work out. I then met my third husband. We lived in Blackpool for a while but moved back to my flat in Scotland when my grandfather got sick. My husband and I live in separate flats and it works a little better.

151. There has been no contact between me and my mum for about six or seven years. You don't miss what you never had. She was never a mother. She was never really equipped to be a mother. I don't blame her. She wasn't ready to be a parent.
152. As he grew up, I fought to see my brother, [REDACTED] I delivered him so he was like my kid. After I'd left care, I got a Facebook message from [REDACTED] Social work wouldn't let me see him. They were determined but I fought tooth and nail to see him. I got a lawyer and they still wouldn't budge. [REDACTED] and I devised our own plan. We broke every code in the social work notebook. I drove to meet [REDACTED] and they couldn't stop us. I told his social worker, Wendy Johnston, that she couldn't stop us and we'd do it my way. We took control back. If she didn't accommodate contact, we were going to do it ourselves. [REDACTED] was fourteen at that time. We'd hang out or he'd stay over at my flat.

Impact

153. I realised that no matter how hard I tried, I would always be working for the man. I realised I was never going to be rich, famous or powerful. I have a reasonably good job that provides me with a stable, secure income. Eventually, I'm going to change jobs and become a mechanic in my friend's garage. I enjoy that work and I wouldn't have to deal with the customers. My career stalled. I could have done so much more, with the right support and safeguards in place. That never happened when I was in care because they weren't equipped and they weren't willing to do it. If you don't give a kid a chance, they'll never show you how brightly they can shine. If you tell a kid often enough that they can't do something, they'll start to believe it. I don't know if I'd be able to go to university or college now. It would take a lot. I'm not the same person I was when I was a kid and I wanted to be a doctor.
154. I don't have a bad job. I have a job that provides me with the flexibility I need to take care of my husband because he doesn't keep well. It provides me with money to buy things. I think I fill my life with possessions because I don't really have anybody, except for my husband who doesn't keep well. I buy things to make me happy. That's become such a normal part of my life that building friendships and relationships is something

that I tend to shy away from. I have anxiety in groups. If I go on a night out, I start to panic. I like the fact that there is only me and three other people at my work at night. That solitude has probably helped me but also hindered me in some respects.

155. My experiences in care have affected my relationships. I trust nobody. I learned that from being in care. Kids in care will say that they're your friend. You tell them stuff and they stab you in the back. You have an intimate conversation with a staff member and they put it in your notes or they put it in your file. I don't trust anybody. I don't trust my husband and we've been married for five years. I've got an app on my phone that lets me know where he is. I've got a best friend in Northern Ireland. I video call him every couple of days. I don't know any of his friends and he doesn't know any of mine. We tell each other our problems and that's it. We never tell anybody about it.
156. I think that being in care has impacted on my mental health. I have severe anxiety and I suffer from depression. I snap a lot of the time. I probably have borderline issues with personality. I avoid being around people deliberately so that I don't snap. When things get too much, I walk the dogs or go to the gym. Even if it's just for half an hour, I get away from all my issues. I have to isolate myself because I can be vicious with words. I lack self-confidence. I know exactly what's wrong with me but it's not something that you can fix.
157. Social work referred me to Break the Silence in Kilmarnock for therapy. I went there about four years ago. I don't think I need therapy. It's very subjective. I've spent many years building the person that I am. I've never discussed my experiences in care in detail with any other person, alive or dead. Therapy wanted that in detail. I couldn't do that in forty minutes. You'll walk in there with a problem and you'll walk out with soul-destroying problem and you have to take it back. They're not happy unless they've ripped apart your entire life. I can't deal with that.
158. People ask me about my childhood. The amount of excuses I've made to get out of that conversation would amaze you. People ask questions that you don't really want to answer. I told my current husband that my mother is dead. My mother and father aren't dead but I don't know where they are. I haven't seen my brothers for a long time.

I delivered one of them in the living room, but I was apart from them from the age of six.

159. LAF [REDACTED] was a very unhappy little boy. He was very unhappy with the person he'd become. I was horrified that I was gay, especially in Seafield. I've spent many years concealing LAF [REDACTED], who is the person I used to be. That boy no longer exists because that boy never became a man. I changed completely because I realised that in order to be a functional human being I could not be the boy that I was in care. I had to be strong. I had to be independent. I had to go out into the big bad world pretending I knew what I was doing. I had no idea how to pay bills, I had no idea how to pay direct debits, I had no idea about anything but I still had to go out into the world and I still had to pretend like I belonged there.
160. In order to remain sane, I don't think about my time in care a lot. I radically changed who I was. I buried my past and I never speak about it. I have many good memories of my time in care but I have so many bad memories too. I went to a lot of trouble to delete my identity. I completely changed. I ditched my short fuse and my temper. I changed my whole personality and became a different person overnight because I had to. It was survival of the fittest when I left care and I had to survive. I have a very dark sense of humour and that helped. Because of all the horrendous things that have happened to me over the years, I became very good at detaching myself from my emotions. I have a great life. I've married a great man, I have my own car, my own house and I'm happy. That's all that matters. The past is the past and it doesn't matter. The most terrible things might have happened to you in the past, but it's all about your future and how you make that future.

Reporting of Abuse after leaving care

161. I took the local authority to court after I left care because of the lack of support I'd been given. I won my case at Ayr Sheriff Court and was moved to a different flat and given a social worker as a result. After I won my case, I decided to leave all that behind. I never made any other complaint or report about my time in care. I'd done what I

needed to do. LAF [REDACTED] died with the court case. The minute it was done, I changed my name, moved into my new place and changed who I was overnight.

Records

162. Some of my records from before I went in to Kilmaurs do exist and are held by East Ayrshire Council. East Ayrshire Council won't give me copies to take home, but I managed to get some. I have to read the others in the social work department. Kilmaurs has closed down and no longer exists so I can't obtain my records from there, other than a couple of reports that I managed to persuade the social work department to give me. Wendy McKeffney, my social worker after I left care, couldn't trace my files from Kilmaurs. She was up front and honest about that. She did everything she could and she showed me the letters she had sent to the people who had been in charge of Kilmaurs.
163. I obtained my records from Seafield when I was seventeen, eighteen years old. Jim Walker, my Throughcare worker, helped me. I had to drive to Quarrier's Village. They weren't that bad, but they were reluctant because I had changed my name. I made it clear to them that it was legal and they had to give them to me or I'd take them to court. I've never read them. I didn't have the heart to read them. They're still in a box in the loft so my husband never stumbles across them.
164. The notes from Oakbank don't exist either because it was run by a trust. I've been trying to obtain my records from Oakbank since the age of sixteen. Aberdeen City Council have ignored umpteen requests and umpteen Freedom of Information requests. I went at them with a lawyer. They basically said, "It's shut down. How are we supposed to know where the notes are?" The chairperson of Aberdeen City Council has ignored my emails. The Council say that their hands are tied because Oakbank was a run by a private trust, which disintegrated when the school closed.
165. After the school shut down, they kept the office open. The two secretaries, Jacqui and Linda, photocopied all the records and digitalised them. It took them five years to finish

the task after the school had closed. I asked Jacqui where they would go and she didn't know. She said they were collected in a white van and she signed a piece of paper to confirm that the records had been transferred. I have a lot of contact with people who were in Oakbank and nobody has been able to get their records. Nobody knows where they went.

Lessons to be Learned

Staffing/restraints

166. There were too many staff who believed that there were bad kids. My theory is that there's no such thing as a bad kid, just bad behaviour. You can't call a kid bad. If you continually drill that into the kid, that kid will eventually come to believe that to the point that they will then be deliberately bad. I believe that every kid deserves a chance. They didn't want to move into care, they didn't ask for it. Why shouldn't they get the same opportunities and the same chances as someone who lives at home with their mum and dad? It's not fair.

167. Some staff are not suited to working in the care sector. The power they have is too great. Restraints are still happening today. As a child growing up, if you have a fourteen, fifteen stone guy on you it can do a lot of damage. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Sometimes, it's not a valuable option. In my experience, you can sometimes do more damage to the kid, the staff and people round about you than you can when you de-escalate the situation. I know de-escalating a highly volatile situation isn't easy and takes a lot of negotiating, but the staff need to be better trained.

168. Restraints should be a thing of the past. They're barbaric. I don't think I've ever come across another restraint technique as dangerous as TCI. It always left either the staff or the kids with some kind of injury. You can't expect a teenager to respond positively to being physically held. You cannot expect that to de-escalate the situation because it's only going to make the child angry. We need to let go of physically containing

children. Children shouldn't be contained in any way whatsoever. They should be encouraged. Children's passions should be encouraged. They can put those things to use when they leave care.

169. Situations aren't de-escalated by restraints or quiet rooms that smell of bleach. Instead, staff should try to understand the problem. You need staff who understand what it's like to be in care. You need staff who understand that a kid doesn't want to be there. They need more training and more knowledge. Not every kid is going to be gay, but children in care should be made to feel like they're in a safe environment. Staff need to have more understanding and more knowledge about things like that.

Children's Panels

170. My experiences of the Children's Panel were that they'd already decided the minute that they got their report from the police, the school, the social worker and everybody else who did reports. It was a waste of time and money and a pointless and fruitless exercise. They didn't care about the child. I was never heard. Any time I requested something from the Panel, I never got it. The Panel needs to be made up of professionals, of people who specialise in care making these decisions. These are three random strangers who don't have a background in care. I sat across from them and they told me what my future was. Why did they get to decide my future? They don't have a clue what it's like for a kid to be removed from a family unit and placed from pillar to post.
171. When I was younger, I felt that the Children's Panel didn't care about my view. A child's view is the most important thing to be taken into consideration. They expect the child to come into a meeting and listen to all these professionals talk about them and talk at them and not listen. A child has needs as well. A child has desires. I wanted to be a doctor and instead I work for the government in a CCTV control room. I was intelligent enough to be a doctor. I think the Children's Panel system should be abolished. It's an absolute sham. They can't expect three random people to change a child's life and expect the child to be okay with that. If a child tells you how they feel and you ignore that, the child will get more and more frustrated. You're never going to make the future

better for them because it's not really what they want. I understand that some children want to move home and it's not an option. Rather than tell them that's not an option, sit down and speak to them and explain things to them.

Social work/support for children in care

172. There should be better living accommodation for children in care and more staff. We didn't get to go on many trips. They were underfunded. A child is like a sponge and absorbs information, so take them places. They should be shown cathedrals, even if they're not religious. Take them to mini golf and paintball. A child should be taken bowling and golfing. Take them on that trip to Paris or Alcatraz. Take them places where they're going to create memories. A kid's life should be filled with fun, knowledge and great positive experiences. If the child can associate with positive things, they will go on to become a better person. I always believe that if a child has a positive upbringing, even if it is in care, the child will grow up to be a better person. They won't need to take drugs or commit a crime to escape.
173. I know you can't give kids everything they want. Financially, it's not possible. There are limits to the purse strings of local authorities. However, I always believe that a kid in care is less fortunate than a kid with two parents in a happy home. You should give them everything you possibly can to make them a bit happier. Financially, it might be tight. At the end of the day, do you want the child to grow up to be in and out of prison and things like that, costing the taxpayer even more money? I was lucky. I escaped all that.
174. The attitude towards residential childcare is a sticky wicket. Local authorities don't want to place kids there because it's expensive. If you've no other option, make it fun and enjoyable. Social workers shouldn't be deciding on placements without ensuring they're right for the child. I want social workers to be going into these places, meeting the principal and saying, "What can you offer my kid? What are you going to give my kid? What happens in here? What are the facilities?" It needs complete transparency, the nitty gritty and not just what they show the visitors.

175. Unless there are extreme circumstances, I don't believe that social workers should dictate how kids see each other. My brother wanted to see me and I wanted to see him. That should be what's important. In my opinion, having been in care, social workers have far too much control. They have unilateral control of things like sibling contact. For some reason, [REDACTED] social worker didn't like me. She said that [REDACTED] didn't want to see me. When I spoke to [REDACTED] face to face, he said that he'd been trying to see me for years.

Education/training

176. Education is so important. Knowledge is power. Having been involved in Who Cares? Scotland and watching kids in care, I think that education is key. If you can give a kid anything, give them education. That's what makes them better human beings because they can better themselves. They can build on the foundation of education. There is so much in life that they can do. As Walt Disney said, "If you can dream it, you can do it." Anything is possible in the world, but you've got to show kids that it can be done. Telling a child that they might as well dream smaller is basically telling them not to dream at all. I know people from all walks of life who have great jobs and not so great jobs, but education is one thing within the care system that needs to be drastically improved. It needs to be emphasised more. You've got to encourage them to go to college, you've got to encourage them to reach for the stars because every kid has a chance to shine brightly. You have to encourage them to take that step. A lot of kids in care will be hesitant.
177. If they can't do what they really want then kids in care are going to end up in a life where they're unhappy. Some kids fall into drugs, prostitution and a life of crime. You don't want that for any child in care. Six of my friends have died because of the lack of support they had from care. One child dying should be enough to shame the system. It should be enough for people to sit down, take notes and say things aren't working and this is what needs to be changed. They need to pour money from other things into education and childcare facilities. A child is only as clever as the books you give them. The more knowledge you give them, the better the life they'll live.

178. There should be basic lessons in things like paying bills. I left care and I didn't know how to do things like that. My electricity was a key payment. I didn't know how to top it up. How can you justify putting a kid in a flat in the middle of nowhere with no support and expect them to live? Leaving care was absolutely disastrous for me. I was expected to be in a flat, by myself and pay bills. I hadn't been given the tools to do that. I was lucky enough that I had a Throughcare worker. Some local authorities don't even have the funding for that. How can you put a kid in a flat after spending sixteen years of being institutionalised? It's like when people come out of prison after ten, fifteen years. They reoffend so that they can go back to prison because it's all they know.
179. I had no idea what the big bad world was like. I had no idea what I was facing. I had to change to match the world on the outside and it was a very scary thing. A lot of kids leaving care have no idea about the real world. They've been in care all their lives. They have no idea how to go to the supermarket and budget. They've no idea how to cook. There was no such thing as home economics at Seafield. There was in Oakbank, but the only thing I remember how to cook is apple crumble. I couldn't live off apple crumble for the rest of my life.

Hopes for the Inquiry

180. I hope that every local authority takes note, sits up and listens. This isn't coming from someone who is in care. It's coming from someone who's experienced care at several different levels in several different placements. Every placement had almost the same negative effects. I believe that every local authority needs to sit up and take responsibility for their actions. I think social work departments need more funding and better training. They have extensive caseloads. You can't expect a social worker with a huge caseload to make a difference in a child's life. How can they make a difference in a child's life when they meet them once a week?
181. They need better vetting for staff and better vetting of placements. I believe that tougher restraints should be in place for the selection of schools. They shouldn't be

randomly picked out. I want not just the social worker but the head of the service to go and look at these schools. They should be vetted and tick every box. If you're putting a child in a residential facility then you want to make sure it's fit for your own child. Are you going to be able to sleep at night if you know that a kid is being verbally or physically abused because I certainly couldn't? Human life is the most precious thing and that child is somebody's pride and joy. You're putting the most precious thing in the world into one of these schools. If you would put your own kid into the school then that's a pass mark for me. If you're pouring taxpayer's money in there, you should want it to have a positive outcome.

182. I don't think places like Seafield and Oakbank should be a thing of the past, but they should only be used when there is absolutely no alternative. Buildings like that stick out like a sore thumb. We were completely isolated. It was stigmatising. People in the community would think, "He goes to that special school, he's a bad boy." Every kid wants a normal childhood. They've got the right idea now with smaller satellite units in the community, but they still don't look like houses. If there are going to be kids in residential schools then they need to have better educational programmes. Kids need to be told that they can dream to be a doctor or a surgeon. They need to be told that they can dream and they need to be told that they're allowed to dream because without dreams, we're robots. If you don't encourage a child to reach for the stars then they'll always be stuck. If that child has potential and big dreams, help them to get there. If you can help a child to achieve that then you've done something good and you've changed the world.

183. 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..... LAF

Dated..... 30 June 2020