

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

EOW

Support person present:

1. My name is EOW My date of birth is 1995. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Lewisham, London. My mother's name is My father's name was although he now asks to be called I hear from him now and again. The last time was at Christmas.
3. My mum and dad were extremely violent to each other. The story I have heard is that my mum fled this abusive relationship and travelled to Scotland. I have tried to confirm this information through my records. As yet I haven't been able to do this.
4. After arriving in Scotland we moved in with my great gran and papa in Irvine. I was always close with them until I moved into care. after staying with my great gran and papa we moved into a three storey house in the Irvine area. I stayed there with my mother and younger sister There is fourteen months age difference between myself and
5. My mum would always have us turned out immaculately. Our hair was always tied up and neat. I remember one day going to Broomlins Primary School. My hair was down and one of the teachers asked why this was. When she moved my hair she could see it was to hide a hand print on my face where my mum had hit me.

6. My mother suffered from mental health issues. She was violent towards myself and [REDACTED]. My mum was also continually involved in relationships that led to domestic abuse. My mum was mentally ill and she did a lot of horrible things to me. As an adult, I can kind of understand the fact that she was a woman who was trying her hardest to give me and my sister the best opportunities in life.
7. Myself and [REDACTED] had been in care once before we started going into respite and foster care. This was when I was around four years old. My mum and her partner at that time had for whatever reason fled down south. We were put into care at Harley Place Children's Unit. All I remember about this was sleeping head to toe with [REDACTED] in a room.
8. On the way south my mother's partner had assaulted her and left her stranded at the side of the motorway. When she returned to Scotland we went back to stay with her. We eventually went into respite care with foster parents.
9. There was a lot of contact with the social work at this time. As a result myself and [REDACTED] were regularly put into respite care. This was with foster parents on a temporary basis. I was once told by a social worker that we had been in every foster home within the North Ayrshire council area. Sometimes this would just be for a day. Other times it might be for more than this. We would always eventually go back and stay with my mother.
10. The social work involved me in the local 'Yes' programme. I would go there after school. The programme involved me in different activities. I remember going to lots of dance classes. I loved to dance. I know now how expensive dance was. I danced three times a week. I competed in competitions. I did all the on-stage performances with the rest of the dance school. When I was taken into care, all of that just stopped.
11. My social worker at this time was Paul Gentini who worked at Dreghorn Social Services, Dreghorn. My mother would sometimes assault Paul when he was at house.

12. Paul had a disability with his hands. I don't mean any disrespect but this is where I have an issue in terms of my records. A lot of his writing is not clear. I think that this is because of Paul's writing style due to his disability.
13. My earliest clear memory was my mum throwing me down the stairs by my hair. This was after we had moved to Irvine. I was getting my hair rinsed with oil to treat nits. It was going into my eyes and I couldn't see. I started to scream and cry. My mum grabbed me and threw me down a flight of stairs causing me to hurt my arm. Rather than call an ambulance my mum phoned her boyfriend at that time, [REDACTED] I could hear her on the phone to him saying, "I think I've killed her". [REDACTED] called an ambulance and came to the house. I was taken to hospital and received 47 stitches for a cut. I had also broken my elbow. Paul Gentini came to the hospital and I told him what had happened. No one seemed to believe me.
14. After having been in hospital I was put back with my mum. It was really upsetting that no one had believed me. There was an investigation that took place. Myself and [REDACTED] were taken to Dreghorn Social Services. We were put in separate rooms. Fran McCann, Paul's supervisor made this decision. [REDACTED] was petrified of our mum. She was afraid of what would happen when she got back home if she said anything about what our mum had done to her. I think that because of this [REDACTED] said one thing and I said something different. I don't remember if there was any police involvement.
15. I have memories of my mum taking me to the social work on other occasions. She would march me in and say I was from the devil. She just left me there. The receptionist used to shout after her to come back. I used to think why does no one want me. It had a real effect on me.
16. On one occasion, I was in a refuge with my mum and my little sister. My mum was in a really abusive relationship, which she had been trying to flee. We were put into what I would now know as a Women's Aid refuge. I think it was in Kilbirnie or somewhere like that. It just felt as though when we were going there that we were driving forever to the back of beyond.

Foster Care placements

17. The first respite placement I can really remember was when I went to stay with a woman called [REDACTED] I don't know her surname. She was married to an Irishman who worked away a lot.

Foster care with [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

18. [REDACTED]'s house was just around the corner from the social work offices. I was told by the social work that if I ever needed anything to come and see them.

Routine

19. When I first started to go to [REDACTED]'s it was only on a Thursday. I was told by social services this was just to give my mum a break. I thought it was fine. Sometimes there would be other children there as well but most of the time it was just me.
20. At this time [REDACTED] would go to another family on the same day as I was going to [REDACTED]'s.
21. I don't know when it was that I started to stay at [REDACTED]'s on a more regular basis. It just seemed to be that sometimes I would be told I was staying for two or three nights. I then started to stay for longer periods.
22. [REDACTED]'s house had two bedrooms. I had my own room where I slept if I was staying there.
23. The dynamics for the sleeping arrangements changed when a girl called [REDACTED] moved in to [REDACTED]'s on a permanent basis. [REDACTED] was given the bed to sleep in. I had to sleep on the floor with a duvet and a pillow. [REDACTED] was at least five years older than me. I think she might have been about twelve years old at that time.
24. [REDACTED] always said that we were best friends. I looked on her as a comfort and protector to me.

Schooling

25. If I was staying at [REDACTED]s I would take a taxi to school. It was the same woman driver every time. I got on well with her.

Visits

26. My social worker Paul would come and see me at [REDACTED]s. It was easy for him to visit me there with his office being so close.

Abuse at [REDACTED]

27. [REDACTED] would say to me that she didn't like me sleeping on the floor. She would ask me to come and sleep with her. I was used to this as I had slept head to toe with my sister in some of the placements where we had been.
28. [REDACTED] would unbutton the duvet cover and say it was a den. We would then go inside the duvet cover. It was fine at first. After a while things changed. [REDACTED] would cover my mouth and then insert different things in my vagina. I remember her using a Spiderman electric toothbrush. She would have music playing in the background on her CD player. The song was called 'Daddy' by Wycliffe Jean. [REDACTED] would say that she was my best friend and this was what best friends did.
29. [REDACTED] would do these things to me every time I was staying at [REDACTED]s.
30. [REDACTED] would always want me to go with her when we went outside. There was a swing park at the end of the street that I wasn't allowed to go any further than. [REDACTED] encouraged me not to listen to [REDACTED] I know now that this was peer pressure to make me go with her.
31. One day we went to a local children's unit, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] knew two boys there, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] She called it 'chapping', which was a word that meant asking them to come out. I don't know the boys surnames. They were both aged around fifteen. We went to a house. It might have been one of the

boys mother's homes but I'm not sure. I remember the house had royal blue walls and blue flooring.

32. We played spin the bottle. At that time I didn't really understand the game. [REDACTED] would tell me to go with the boy where the bottle landed. They would strip off and insert themselves inside me. I remember not really knowing what was happening. I just kept thinking that [REDACTED] was my friend and I didn't want to upset her. I can't remember if this happened with both boys or just one. I'm not sure how many times this happened to me.
33. [REDACTED] would go with the other boy depending on where the bottle had stopped.
34. There was another occasion when myself [REDACTED] and the boys went down to an area called The Brae. It had a river next to it. I was swimming naked in the river when I noticed someone had stolen a T shirt from my back pack. The T shirt had Henrik Laarson on it. He used to play for Celtic and I really liked him. The shirt meant a lot to me because my mum had bought it. [REDACTED] became really protective of me and started to fight the boys to get my T shirt back.
35. When the things with [REDACTED] were happening to me I think I felt confused. I just thought it was what best friends did. It was only later when I had sex education that I realised it was not. I thought then that all the things I was being told about had already happened to me.
36. [REDACTED] seemed to be the only person I could talk to and would listen to me. I didn't want anything to happen that would stop her being my friend.

Leaving foster care at [REDACTED]

37. I think that I would have stayed on and off at [REDACTED]'s for about eight months. When I left it was a few days before my eighth birthday.

38. When I moved to the foster carers who I would later call mum and dad it happened without warning. I had been at [REDACTED]s a while and I was always asking social work when I would be going home. The response was always soon or tomorrow or a few days but it never happened.
39. The day I left [REDACTED]s Paul Gentini and another social worker, Amelia came to [REDACTED]s. They just told me to pack my things but never said where I was going. We went in a people carrier. There was no chat in the car when normally there would be. It was a horrible experience. Something must have happened for this move but I don't know what it was. The journey seemed to last forever but it really was only about half an hour.

Foster care, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Kilmarnock

40. When I moved in with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] I thought that it would just be for a short time. Their house had three bedrooms. My bedroom was the smallest but it was fine for me. The [REDACTED] had an older daughter who also stayed with them. I think she would have been about thirty when I moved there.
41. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] fostered for North Ayrshire Council due to [REDACTED] working for the social work in [REDACTED]. She dealt with child protection issues in [REDACTED] therefore could not foster for East Ayrshire.
42. There were lots of photographs on the walls showing all the children they had fostered. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] told me that they always fostered with the aim to be with the child until it was time for them to leave. They didn't see fostering as a short term thing.

Routine

43. Staying with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] was a different experience for me. In some ways it was good. In other ways it was really confusing. I wasn't used to being cared for how they cared for me. It was like I said jump and they said how high.

Mealtimes

44. I was anorexic when I went into care. It is documented in my medical records that this was due to neglect and abuse. I think [REDACTED] saw me and thought I needed 'fattened' up. He would always give me whatever I wanted to eat. I was told if I wanted something from the kitchen to help myself. If it wasn't there they would go to the shops and buy it. I don't know if [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were aware I was anorexic. It was clear though that I was malnourished.

Clothing/belongings

45. I became a bit challenging. I would empty my room of everything other than what my own mum had bought me. I also used to rip up designer clothes that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had bought me. I wanted to see how they would react. I expected them to retaliate and hit me. At first I don't think they knew what to do. They never reacted in a bad way.
46. There was one occasion after I had kicked off when [REDACTED] came to my room. He brought a tray with all my favourite cakes, ice cream and crisps. He said that he just wanted to let me know they loved me. This took me back and I think it was a turning point for me.

Birthdays/Christmas

47. I had my eighth birthday not long after I arrived. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] asked me what I liked. I told them that I liked things to do with Celtic. On my birthday they bought me everything. I didn't know how to deal with this.
48. I was given everything I wanted for Christmas. I remember one Christmas all the couches in the living room were covered in presents for me. There was even a bike. I had never rode a bike before and always wanted one. There was that much I ended up fainting. My natural mum had tried her best when I was with her but I was definitely spoiled at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Trips

49. I used to go to what I called 'Brat Camps'. These were run by a Christian society. The purpose was just to try and help you work through your problems. I found the camps a bit confusing we sing songs but not hymms. I wasn't allowed to sing the hymms I sang at school as this was Roman Catholic. I found this very confusing.
50. At one of the camps I was arrested for being violent and getting into trouble. I couldn't go back to my foster parents as they were away on holiday. I had to be put into Dalrymple Children's Unit until [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] came back. I think it was only for a couple of nights

Schooling

51. At first I went to school at St Mark's Primary before moving to St Columba's Primary School.
52. Before moving to secondary I had to go to induction days at St Joseph's Academy. I met a girl, [REDACTED] who I became friends with. Her family were into stealing and drugs. I think that when [REDACTED] found out who I was friends with she did everything in her power to keep us apart. Although she never said anything I think that [REDACTED] knew from her work all about [REDACTED] and didn't want me to be friends with her because of this. All it meant was that I started to react against what [REDACTED] was doing. I made sure that I was still friends with [REDACTED]
53. I was always academically ahead of the other pupils before I went into care. My report cards were always very good. This changed when I went into foster care. I started not to care about school work. I was still good at a lot of the subjects. The problem was that if I couldn't be bothered the whole class suffered. I would disrupt the class.

Leisure time

54. I loved dancing. I danced three times a week when I was with my biological mum. When I had been in foster placements, this had been kept up. When I lived with [REDACTED]

and [REDACTED] they always encouraged it. They still dropped me off although I think it was reduced to two times a week. This was just because of the dance school that I'd moved to rather than [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] cutting it back.

Review of time in care

55. I still had to attend regular panels. [REDACTED] would come with me. She would tell them that I needed help to work through my issues. No one ever helped me. I did go to CAMS, which was a children's mental health charity.
56. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were trying to obtain parental rights for me at these panels. As they didn't have any it was almost like they had to ask permission even for me to have my haircut. It would almost get to the point where parental rights were going to be granted then my mum would get involved and stop it happening.
57. My biological mum would always create problems. An example of this was when my foster mum took me to the catholic church on a Sunday. I had to go because my foster dad was working. When my biological mother found out she kicked off and said she didn't want me going there. She still had the right to involve herself with certain things. Other times she wouldn't turn up when she was supposed to. I felt devastated when she didn't turn up. I was still hoping that my mum would fight for me.
58. This went on for about two years. Sometimes my mum would storm in throwing things about. Other times everyone was left hanging about wondering if she would turn up. It ended up the panels became all about her and not about me. It was eventually decided that she would only receive two letter contacts. This meant my mum was only allowed two contact me twice a year by letter. This could be an actual letter or just a birthday card.
59. [REDACTED] would tell the panels that the behaviour of my mum was having a real impact on me, which it was. When she didn't turn up it would normally lead to me becoming

violent then having a blackout. After these blackouts I couldn't remember what I had done. Despite [REDACTED] almost begging the panels to act nothing was done for about two years in terms of my foster parents parental rights.

Visits/sibling contact

60. I had supervised visits with my mum and [REDACTED]. These were initially twice a week, then it became once a week and more like once a month. Eventually my mum stopped turning up. This meant that I wouldn't see [REDACTED] either. [REDACTED] was still staying with my mum. I think that there was still things going on in the house. [REDACTED] was still too frightened to say anything.
61. When I did see [REDACTED] I would always be dressed in a certain way with the designer clothes that my foster parents had bought me. I know if this effected how she thought about me. I think that this really fractured our relationship. I would get a hostile reception from my mum because I had things that she couldn't give me or my sister. I was like a working class middle class imbalance.
62. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] would give me hand me down clothes for [REDACTED] when I went to meet her. Again I think that this affected how my mum thought about me and her abilities as a mum.
63. It was the panels who would decide how often the visits with my mum and sister were. Both me and my sister wanted to see each other more. We kept asking for more contact but it never happened. It was in fact reduced.
64. I have extended family, half-brother [REDACTED]. I never had any contact with him whilst I was in care. I also have two half-sisters on my dad's side called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Again I never saw them whilst I was in care. They lived in Drumchapel so it wasn't as if they weren't local. My younger half-sister [REDACTED] lived in London at the time. I have met her now but I never met her whilst I was in care.

65. I don't have a relationship with any of my siblings now even though I have tried to. The fact that the relationships weren't maintained whilst I was in care has been deeply traumatic.
66. I have read in my social work file that we all wanted to see each other but it never happened.
67. When I was in care I requested to see my great gran and papa and this never happened.
68. When I asked the social work to see my family member I was told to bring it up at my review. When I brought it up at my review nothing ever happened.

Social work

69. One of the big things that I feel let down by was the amount of different social workers I had. Paul Gentini started a new job so another social worker, Clare, was assigned to me. I found this difficult as Paul had been with me for such a long time.

Holidays

70. I would go on holiday with my foster parents. We went to Port Patrick a few times. I also had a holiday abroad with them at Salou in Spain.

Discipline

71. ██████ told me that he had been in care as a child after being abused by his father. This made ██████ more lenient towards me and always give me what I wanted or asked for. If I asked for something from ██████ he would get it straight away.
72. I would say that ██████ was more hard faced and disciplined than ██████. She wouldn't let me have my own way if I had done something wrong.

Other information

73. I ended up staying with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] for nearly five years. After a while I asked [REDACTED] if I could call him dad. I found it harder with [REDACTED] but about a year after I had started calling [REDACTED] dad I started to call her mum. I now looked on [REDACTED] as my real mum rather than my biological mother.
74. I kept expecting that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] would give up on me the same as everyone else. When they didn't I couldn't understand why.

Leaving foster care with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

75. My behaviour became more and more violent. This was especially towards [REDACTED] I would hit her on the way to school. I don't just mean a slap. I would punch her repeatedly.
76. Eventually social work and the police began to become more involved.
77. One night I was put in my room as I was being violent towards [REDACTED] It was also to stop me seeing [REDACTED] I knew that [REDACTED] had money and I wanted to go with her to the shops. I managed to get out of the house and I went to see [REDACTED] at her mums house. [REDACTED]'s mum was a heroin addict. [REDACTED] had stolen a lot of money from her. Her mum and a female friend were in the house and started to attack [REDACTED] really badly. I was terrified. They were trying to check if she had the money hidden on her. After her mum and friend left [REDACTED] showed me the money which she had hid down her pants.
78. We went down the street and spent the money on fags and drink.
79. When I went back to my mum and dad's nothing happened to me. I think that this was significant because my mum had tried to stop me seeing [REDACTED] I had went against this and became her best friend.

80. One day I was out with my friends. I stayed out past the curfew my mum and dad had gave me. I think this was about seven or eight at night. again this was a big thing that I had rebelled against. I ended up at my one of my friend's houses. [REDACTED] came to the door to say it was time for me to go home. I don't remember the specifics but I started attacking [REDACTED] quite badly. I don't remember exactly what happened but I think the police came and I was arrested me and I was put in a cell. #

81. The on call social work came and transferred me to Kilmaurs Children's Unit. This unit was in East Ayrshire Council area. I shouldn't have been there because I am from North Ayrshire not East Ayrshire. Once the staff found this out I was given the option of a number of children's units in North Ayrshire, including Dalrymple Children's Unit. I knew of this unit because of the time I had been put in there when I was arrested at the 'Brat Camp'.

82. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

83. I was led to believe at the time that my foster parents wanted nothing more to do with me so I couldn't go back with them. I found out as an adult through my social work records this wasn't true. My foster parents had fought tooth and nail to try and get me back with them. They had told the social work and the police they would take me back. The police wouldn't allow it. They said it was too dangerous. I thought at the time that my foster parents had given up on me.

Dalrymple Children's Unit, Dalrymple Place, Irvine

84. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Harley Place Children's Unit, Saltcoats

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Achnamara Children's Unit, Nelson Street, Stevenson

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Mount View Children's Unit, Main Street, Dreghorn

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Life after leaving care

330.  Secondary Institutions - to be published later
331. I tried to budget. I would work out how much I had from my work and what I needed to get to college. I was trying to plan everything but I was really struggling. A big Farmfoods opened nearby. I decided to buy a chest freezer for £20 off one of those selling sites on Facebook. I went and did a big shop and I knew that regardless of anything else, I'd have what I needed to get to and from college and things in the freezer that would do me. I put the toaster on before I went to college in the morning and the fuse went. I didn't know what had happened. There were no lights and nothing was working. I could see the street lights were on and I could hear my neighbour's telly. The housing person from the council had showed me how to check the meter, so I did that and there was money in the meter. I phoned the council. I waited for six and a half hours for a guy to come out from the council. When he got to my flat, he burst out laughing and told me that the fuse had gone. In that time, I lost all the shopping I'd done for my freezer. Things like that seemed to happen all the time.
332. I was in brand new, temporary accommodation. People had found out it was for homeless people or people leaving the care system. There was a petition going round the street to get me out. As soon as I moved in, there were constant complaints about me. I could fart on the street and someone would phone the council and complain about me. It was ridiculous. People were going into my job, complaining about me having my music on. I wasn't partying in my house and the music was down low, but I

ended up losing my job. They were customers and they couldn't have customers complaining about me. They were determined to ruin my life. I started falling behind in my course work at college.

333. Throughcare had a duty of care at that point to pay my rent and give me £50 a week. I didn't know this at the time. Everybody else got theirs in a wee brown envelope. Someone would drop it off and check in with them, make sure they were doing alright. I used to get mine transferred into my bank account. I started seeing a guy who was also raised in care called [REDACTED]. He couldn't understand why I didn't get a phone call and he got a phone call. Throughcare just didn't care so they didn't want to come and see me.
334. Throughcare did phone me one day to tell me that I needed to move. They said they understood that it wasn't me, but they were getting too many complaints about me. I was getting letters from the housing all the time, threatening to evict me. There must have been some kind of meeting between them all and they decided to move me. I still didn't want to stay Irvine. I'd been asking them constantly to transfer my caseload to East Ayrshire Council so I could live in Kilmarnock. I was repeatedly told they couldn't do it because of budgets. I was moved to Lawthorn, which was in the back of beyond in Irvine. It was in the middle of nowhere, miles away from anything. I ended up getting really depressed. I was stuck in this flat and I couldn't go anywhere. There was no public transport to get me to Kilmarnock without having to walk forty minutes to get to the bus route.
335. I stayed in that flat for a while. I was then told that a paedophile was being released from jail. He wasn't allowed in any of the other temporary accommodations because of restrictions. They said they needed me to move out so they could give him my flat. I was then moved near to the same street that my biological mum stayed on. I was in another temporary accommodation. All this time, my housing officer was telling me that I was on a waiting list for a house and that it shouldn't take that long.
336. I was on my own. Everything had stopped when I moved into my first flat. CAMHS stopped, the LAC health nurse stopped, Rosemount stopped. It had a huge impact. I'd been seeing Rosemount once a week. Throughcare services would show up if I

had to move. They would turn up in a van or a car and help me pack up my stuff and move. I wouldn't see them again until the next time I had to move.

337. I ended up in a relationship where there was domestic abuse. I didn't know North Ayrshire that well. The only people I knew were people who I grew up with in children's units. I came across one of those people and got into a relationship with him. He went to jail. He was in and out of jail. I did eventually get a house in [REDACTED] in Irvine, which was across the road from the children's unit at [REDACTED], but the unit had been shut down by then.
338. When my boyfriend got out of jail, he was really violent towards me. Throughcare were aware of this. I didn't know it at the time but they had come out one day and I'd been locked in my bedroom. My boyfriend opened the door to them and there was heroin all over my living room. I didn't know that until I came out of the bedroom. Throughcare never said anything about it or questioned it. It was obvious that he was being extremely violent towards me. Nothing was ever said.
339. It was the first and only time that Throughcare had started to come out to see me. It was because they were doing some sort of skills course over at their base. I'd been living by myself for about two years, so I found it a bit strange that they now wanted to do that for me. I thought it would get me out of the house. I was in a relationship where I couldn't really get out of the house. I wasn't allowed to leave. The person I was living with was a traveller. It wasn't in his culture for me to be going out. I just wanted to die. I had tried to commit suicide many times.
340. My boyfriend whacked me so badly that I ended up down the bottom of the stairs and I split my head open. My friend came round and found me. She said she couldn't keep watching while this was happening to me. She dragged me to the doctors to explain what was happening. I didn't know this, but she had contacted my foster sister, [REDACTED] through Facebook. She told them where I was and what was going on. They reappeared and were not going to accept that for me. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] came out and picked me up there and then. They took me back to get my essentials and they moved me back with them.

341. I hadn't had any contact with my foster mum and dad for years. They explained that they were told by social work that it would be inappropriate to maintain contact with me. I had gone through my whole life thinking that they had just fobbed me off and didn't want anything to do with me. After I had been arrested, they had begged for me to come back home but the control was taken away from them. I didn't know any of that. I had grown up thinking that they hated me and they didn't love me and it was just another form of rejection.
342. My foster parents couldn't have me live with them because they were still fostering. My foster gran had a spare bedroom at the back so I moved in with her. I went to housing but they said that there was nothing they could do for me because I was from North Ayrshire. My foster mum eventually encouraged me to go to Women's Aid. The police were never involved when I was assaulted because I didn't want them to be. They put me in a refuge in Kilmarnock and I lived there for a while. Within all this time, I was trying to get in touch with Throughcare. They would never answer the phone or get in contact with me.
343. Living in a Women's Aid refuge, you had to pay rent which I didn't realise. I didn't have the means to do that. The staff there told me not to worry about it. They did an in depth interview. I had to keep going back to them all the time. Because I had been in care, they said they would try and reach out to Throughcare. Although they were ignoring my phone calls, they thought they might answer to them. I don't know, but I'm assuming they must have stepped in to pay my rent. They must have stepped into bridge that gap, but there was still no support. Nobody came out to see me. I'd asked so many times to live in Kilmarnock. Women's Aid made it very clear that because it was domestic violence I couldn't go back to my own local authority anyway because it wasn't safe. That meant I couldn't go back to North Ayrshire and Irvine, but Throughcare were saying that I could only go there. They just disengaged from it completely.
344. I managed to get a flat through Women's Aid. East Ayrshire housing linked in with Women's Aid, who told them that I couldn't go back to North Ayrshire. That worked in my favour because I eventually got to Kilmarnock. I had had to get battered to move to Kilmarnock. I want to know why my case was never transferred to East Ayrshire. It

would have made the most logical sense throughout my life if it had just been transferred. My life would have been so different and I want to know why that never happened. That's a key issue for me.

345. I lived in a flat in Kilmarnock. Again, I had no support and again, I begged for support. I went to Throughcare services and social work. I contacted them numerous times. I'll be the first to admit that I was verbally aggressive at times. I knew that I was supposed to be accommodated and looked after until the age of 21. I knew I was entitled to support until the age of 21. I was trying my hardest to stay in education at the time. I was studying health and social care at Ayrshire College. I had decided to go down the route to being a social worker. I later figured out that wasn't the route I wanted to go down because you can't really help anyone as a social worker, as much as everyone goes into social work with the best of intentions.
346. When I got my flat in Kilmarnock, the boyfriend who had assaulted me got out of jail. I went back to him like an idiot. Eventually, he cheated on me and he found his own way out. He robbed me first. I moved out of that flat for about three months, trying to sort my life out. I was out in Spain for about three months. I wanted to try and better myself. That didn't work out so I came back.
347. I got a job when I came back from Spain. I did another course at college. I got a job in a cafe and worked my way up to supervisor, working part-time. They saw potential in me. I moved to Glasgow and I was there for a while. I continued to ask for help and support from Throughcare but didn't get it. I managed to find a flat by myself and put a deposit down. I lived there for about a year. I realised I was sick of it. I was 21 and all I'd ever known was working crazy hours. I was trying to keep my head above water and never really living my life.
348. I decided that I wanted to go and travel. I saw everybody was away travelling and taking gap years. I was a bit jealous. I packed all my bags again and applied to do volunteer work in West Africa through the ICS programme. Although it was voluntary you were given an allowance which was enough to live off. You lived with a family, which was a bit like foster care. I managed to pass all the interviews and everything

with flying colours. I packed up all my stuff again, sold loads of it and gave lots of it to Syrian refugees.

349. I moved out to West Africa for three months and decided that I didn't want to come back to Scotland. The charity said no because I was a foreign aid worker and they flew me back. I raised £2500 by myself and went back out to Senegal and lived there for another six months. I was raped and I got stranded. I couldn't get home. I had to fundraise again to get back. Once again, when I got home Throughcare wouldn't help me. I was homeless because I'd given up everything to go.
350. I stayed with my best friend, sleeping at the back door. She had four other people moving in with her at the same time because everybody had such dysfunctional lives.
351. I was trying to get a house and I couldn't get one. East Ayrshire Council said they couldn't help me because I wasn't one of their care experienced people. North Ayrshire said they couldn't help me unless I wanted to move to North Ayrshire. I couldn't live in North Ayrshire because my mum and my wee sister live there. It wasn't safe for me. I looked around everywhere, trying to get a private let. I couldn't get a private let because I didn't have any money.
352. I eventually found a private let. I went to view a house and the lady said that she'd googled me and seen all the fundraising stuff that I'd done. I managed to secure a job with one of the local banks.
353. I stayed there for a year and worked at the bank for two and a half years. I fell pregnant when I was still working but I was bedbound for a while with sciatica. I had my baby and was applying to college at the same time. I'm doing an HNC in social sciences. I've applied to do a degree in politics and social policy. I've been accepted for that. I had to move house but I couldn't get any help to do that. I couldn't get the first month's rent up front. I wasn't entitled to anything. Luckily, my foster dad, who has his own health issues stepped in and paid my first month's rent and my deposit. That way I was able to find a house.

354. I still have a relationship with my foster parents, but it can be strange. If I phone and say I need £300, my foster father will give me it. If I phone and say I'm struggling with my mental health, my foster parents wouldn't really know what to do. It's not that kind of dynamic but they're still my mum and dad and I love them.
355. When I had my son, I felt guilty that I wasn't in contact with my natural mum. I wanted him to have as much family as he could round about him. I realised that was a very bad mistake, having her back in my life, so I cut her back out. She's drifted in and out. I go through phases where I feel bad for cutting her out and I let bygones be bygones and let her back in. I always then realise that she's off her head and it's toxic. I know where I want to be in life and it's a shame that she can't go on that journey with me, but she makes everything negative and pulls me down.
356. My sister, [REDACTED] is just as bad, if not worse. I did have contact with her when she left care. We ended up fighting and she contacted the police and I was arrested. I managed to get people from the college to write testaments. I got testaments from so many professionals that the Procurator Fiscal agreed to drop the charges. I was really lucky because I wouldn't have been able to do my college placement with those charges. [REDACTED] is still my sister and I've still got a lot of love for her, but we just don't have a relationship and she's not the type of person I want around my son.

Impact

357. Everything has an impact and everything has a snowball effect, but for me, going from being so heavily involved with social work to nothing and the consequences of that are hugely important. I really struggled. I had no stable accommodation and I went into a relationship where there was domestic abuse.
358. The frustration is endless. I can't help but think where I would be in life otherwise. I'm 24 years old. All I see round about me is everybody I went to school has graduated. Everybody is doing so much better in life than me. They've all got jobs and they've settled down, got married, got a career in front of them and they've got their first house. I'm still struggling to keep everything in my head. As much as I want to avoid it, I'm

probably going to end up evicted because I can't afford to continue to be in education. Where's the justice in that?

Parenting

359. When I fell pregnant I changed my life a lot. There's bits I'll go back to and bits I won't go back to, but I'll do anything in my power to make sure that my son doesn't have the shitty childhood that I had.
360. Being in care has had a massive impact on me as an adult. It's had a huge impact on me as a mum. When anyone in Scotland falls pregnant, she contacts her GP. She gets a booking-in appointment. At that appointment, there is a two hour questionnaire where you meet a midwife. There are personal details all about your family and whether there's any heart disease, diabetes and all that kind of stuff. They then do a risk assessment. Within the risk assessment, it asks, "Have you ever been a prostitute? Have you ever had an STI? Have you ever had sex with someone from a foreign country? Are you looked after or have you ever been looked after by a local authority?" Straight away, that's setting you up. I was always really curious about why it was being asked.
361. As a care-experienced person, I could see why I got my back up and wondered why they were asking me that. I can also see from an academic, professional point of view that they're trying to establish a risk, to see whether I need any additional support. I was reluctant to say that I was care-experienced but I could identify that I was also very fearful. I had an attachment disorder because of the way my mum was with me. I was petrified of having my wee boy and not having a bond with him or an attachment to him. I was open and honest about it. I remember speaking to the midwives and telling them that I was scared I was going to end up with post-natal depression and not have a bond with my son. I told them I was care-experienced and asked what help they had, but there was nothing. I still really struggle to understand why that question was there in the first place because there was no additional support.
362. Nobody came out to show me how to bath or swaddle my son. I didn't have a mum, a dad, a granny or and aunty to show me that. I was petrified of becoming a mum. I was

also petrified that if I didn't know how to do these things, somebody was going to come and take him away from me. It doesn't seem to be recognised that being a single parent and being care-experienced, I don't have anybody to turn to. Future Pathways have helped, but I've had to fight for that. The day to day challenges for me are difficult fitting in childcare with my college work.

363. I am considered to be in full time education. How can I physically do those hours when I'm a single mum with a one and a half year old son. I'm not saying other single parents don't have challenges, but as a care-experienced single parent I don't have a mum that I can ask to take the wean for a weekend. The only person I have is my friend, [REDACTED] He's under no obligation to do that. He's doing it as a mate, but that's the only person that I have.


364. I think it's really important to say that my experiences in care don't just impact on me, they impact on future generations. I'm trying to create better opportunities for my son so that he doesn't experience all those things. How can I make sure that he doesn't experience all those things when all I've got is challenges? Those challenges mean that it gets more and more likely all the time that he will be taken into care anyway. I'm doing everything in my power to make sure that doesn't happen. I don't have social work involvement. I've had three social work referrals. All three referrals have come from me standing up and saying that I need help, every one of them. What are you meant to do?

Relationships

365. I struggle with everything in relationships, trust issues, paranoia. I don't feel that I am deserving of love. I'm trying to realise now, through my son, that I am deserving of love. Even when I'm with people, I can't believe that they are actually committed to me or see anything in me. I really struggle to be with anyone and accept that. I've never really had a long term relationship. Every relationship I've had has just been sex. Because of everything that happened with [REDACTED] I don't know when I lost my virginity. People say it's meant to be an experience that never leaves them. I don't know when I can define as losing my virginity. People might say at the time when it wasn't abuse, but what time wasn't abuse. I don't know.

366. Even when I didn't stay with [REDACTED] I was groomed on so many occasions.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later



Siblings

367. As I have said earlier in my statement I have a sister [REDACTED] I feel even now I still don't have a relationship with her. This is due to continually being put against each other by social work. This would be things like one of us being with our mother and the other not. It seems like we were always pitched against each other by social work. We went from being really close before we went into care to not now having any relationship at all. I think this also relates to our relationship with our mum. It always seemed one of us would be in with our mum whilst the other was left out. This has had a really big impact on my life. I have not spoken with my sister for over three years.

368. There was never any contact with my older brother, [REDACTED] throughout my whole time in care. We don't know each other now and we never have. This was because no relationship was ever encouraged by social work whilst I was in care.

369. Again whilst I was in care there was no relationship encouraged with my older sisters, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] whilst I was in care. Although we have now reached out to each other it is problematic as I resent them for not coming to get me whilst I was in care. They will say how could they have when they didn't know I was in care and were never contacted by social work.

370. No relationship was ever encouraged with my younger sister [REDACTED] when I was in care. It is difficult now to have a relationship because there was never one there when we were younger.
371. In summary I am one of six siblings and I don't have any relationship with any of my siblings. This is due to social work never encouraging any relationships between us.
372. This has a generational impact as everyone has their own children who are cousins. Due to us not having a relationship the cousins don't have one either. All this is due to the lack of effort by social work to encourage sibling contact.

Mental health

373. I tried to take my own life on a number of occasions. When I was living near my natural mum I tried to re-engage with her. She'd asked that we all go and have Christmas there as a family. I agreed to do that. I went over on Christmas Eve. There was a big argument and I didn't know what to do. I went home and tried to take my own life. I just decided I didn't want to be here anymore. I went into some sort of fit. I had a realisation that I didn't want to die. I panicked and phoned 999. I spent Christmas Eve into Christmas day and boxing day in hospital.
374. When I was at college, there was someone on the board of Who Cares Scotland in my class. He asked whether I'd heard about the Christmas dinner because it was obvious that I hated Christmas. I always have done. He picked up on that. Every year since then, I've organised an event for people who are care experienced. We meet up every Christmas day. This year, we had 116 people. It's for people who are currently in care or have been in care and they either have their own kids or don't have their own kids. I do a lot of campaign work through Who Cares Scotland.

Other information

Counselling/treatment

375. I've had some referrals for treatment. There's a big risk of post-natal depression in my family. I was convinced that I had it after having my son. He had colic and he was a nightmare. I was convinced that it meant that I didn't love him because I was so stressed all the time. I was emotional and overwhelmed and struggling to cope. I went to my GP and asked for help. They sent a mental health crisis team out within 24 hours to assess me. They said that there was nothing wrong and they closed the case.
376. When I applied to give evidence to the Inquiry, Future Pathways did an assessment over the telephone. They thought I could do with some psychological help and referred me to a team in Glasgow. The people there said there was a need. However, their fear was that it might become more of a hindrance because I was trying to juggle being a mum, being a student and everything else. They didn't think it would be in my best interests because it would be adding something else onto my list. They referred me back to the college to get counselling. The college said the same thing because I couldn't go to a counselling session with my son.
377. Up until 2016 and before I had my son I probably tried to commit suicide at least nine times when I've ended up in hospital. Each time, I was assessed and discharged. They just said that there's nothing wrong with me. Since then I have had no suicidal thoughts.

Reporting of abuse

378. I believe that I have spoken to the police about my mum's violence when I was a child. I've never spoken to the police about what happened with [REDACTED] or my mum as an adult. I've tried to contact the social work department, but got nothing.

Records

379. There are no pictures of me as a kid. I don't have anything like that. I have seen my records. I couldn't read them because they were so heavily redacted. I was put in a glass box in a room in North Ayrshire council offices to sit and read them. It was at Bridgegate House. There was one file that was all child protection reports. Someone from Throughcare came with me to view them. She was hysterically crying. She said it was minutes from meetings because, yet again, I'd been showing signs that someone had been physically violent towards me or something had flagged at a child protection meeting. She didn't understand why I had one full folder full of them. She didn't understand why that had been allowed to happen.
380. Since this first time I saw my records I have been given more access to additional files about my time in care. These were also heavily redacted. They also had information that didn't relate to me but other children that my foster parents had fostered. That information should not have been in my file. There was also a lot of relevant information about me that was missing. I passed this file onto my counsellor. They have all my records now.

Lessons to be learned

381. I campaign as an adult to say that nobody should be left to their own devices at the age of sixteen. I know that the system had conditioned me to be in the mind frame that when I reached sixteen, that would be me getting my own free will. I'd been controlled all my life. That was me getting to the point where I could be my own person. There was no stopping me. I was going to get my own house, but I should have at least been shown how to do basic things. There are still things I don't know. Was I ready to leave at the age of sixteen? Was a cooking for care leavers course going to work when I didn't know what an avocado was when I left care? I only learned what one was a couple of months ago when I was trying to cook for my son. I didn't know what a sweet potato was or what you did with it. I phoned my friend, crying, because I didn't know how to cook an avocado. I didn't know these things and I didn't feel comfortable in a kitchen.

382. If you're brought up in a family home, you would say to your child in the kitchen, "Go and cut that onion for me." In a children's unit, what you say is, "You can't be trusted with that knife, so the knives are going to be kept in a cupboard and the cupboard's going to be locked and behind that cupboard there'll be a safe and within that safe, that's where the knives will be." Everything was triple locked. How could I be comfortable at sixteen years old to even chop an onion?

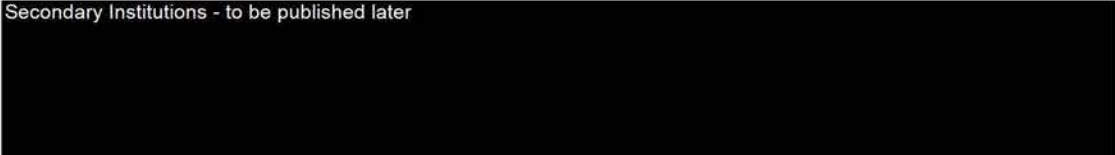
383. I feel that I was let down by the social work. If they had concentrated on me they would have seen what was happening to me. The social work seemed to want to always get me back with my mother despite what was happening to me. When I did go into care I seemed to always be moved about. Again the social work were not trying to find out what was wrong with me.

384. One of the key things I want to stress is that the biggest abuse of all was that I was taken from North Ayrshire, my home, and put into Kilmarnock in East Ayrshire. I was taken from East Ayrshire after almost five years. I'd built up all of these relationships and then put back to North Ayrshire. You may as well as put me in a rocket and shot me off to the moon. I didn't know the place. It wasn't home to me. I was told to build connections and realise that Kilmarnock was now my life, then I was put to Irvine, put to Saltcoats, put to Stevenson and all of North Ayrshire.

385. Children should not be removed from their own communities into other areas they are not familiar with.

386. I think it's really important that we have policies and processes, but a lot of that takes away from conversations. I don't know when my first period was. I didn't know it was a period. Those kind of moments are important. I don't know those moments because nobody had a chat with me about them.

387. Secondary Institutions - to be published later



388. Residential children's units should be closed down. I understand that's a very radical statement, but it doesn't work. It doesn't matter if it's a six bed, twelve bed, a six bed or an eight bed. Having constant shift patterns and shift changes, the whole terminology of slipping through the net, it doesn't wash. You can't have meaningful, loving relationships with people who finish their shift at 2:00 pm and are away out the door and get the next one in. I think something similar to foster care is the alternative. There should be a big push for foster carers, but not people who are paid a wage to look after someone. It should be people who want a kid to come into their home like their children. I understand that they need additional financial support, but it should be like an additional benefit like child benefit.

389. My foster mum and dad still foster. They sign a contract that says they're entitled to 28 days holiday. If you tell people that, they're going to take it because they're entitled to it. In the meantime, another placement is found for the child. How horrible is that? How damaging is that to a child? I don't agree with it.

390. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Hopes for the Inquiry

391. I hope the Inquiry exposes a lot of the truths of what has actually gone on, not just in the sixties and seventies. That's also really important, but some of that is still happening today, maybe not to the same extreme, but it's still not where it should be now.

392. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

393.

394. Local authorities need to be held to account. I know of at least five other people who have come forward to give evidence about North Ayrshire Council and the way it operates now. The biggest take away from me from giving evidence to the Inquiry is that I feel validated. I'm right and I want to take some sort of action. Somebody needs to be held to account for that. Where would my life be now if I'd been taken into care earlier, wasn't as traumatised as what I was from my mum and all the trauma that then came afterwards from being passed from pillar to post? What would have happened if I'd just been put into long term foster care straight away? What would have happened if I'd been put straight into my foster mum and dad's house and where would my life be now? They've had so many foster children since who are now driving, at university, are qualified nurses. I'm just out here and I'm still struggling.
395. When will North Ayrshire Council be held to account? They've currently got a legal responsibility for me up until the age of 25. I've been fighting this my whole life. It's as if they're waiting until I turned 25 and then they can say, "Sorry. You're 25 now." When do they get to be told that they need to be accountable? Everybody's telling them. The law is telling them, my solicitor is telling them. I do believe that the Inquiry will tell them, but by the time the Inquiry has published its' findings and everybody else has published their findings, will I just be another person who has slipped through the cracks? I've known seven people who have committed suicide who I was friends with throughout the time I was in North Ayrshire's care. That's only the ones that I know of. When does it change and when do these people get held to account?

- 396. If people who have been in care and then provided evidence to the Inquiry have been left with debt as a result of their time in care should be financially supported and have this debt cleared.
- 397. People who have been traumatised through being in care should be offered therapy without the financial barrier to access it.
- 398. The Inquiry should look at ways in which siblings can be re-united after being separated as a result of being in care.
- 399. All foster carers, social workers and residential staff should undertake education and training in relation to people of colour, religion and diverse backgrounds.
- 400. 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.

EOW


Signed.....

Dated... 20/08/2021