

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 394

Witness Name HIA 394

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 394

HIA 394 will say as follows:-

Personal Details

1. I was born [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Co. Tyrone.
2. I have seven siblings. An older sister called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] younger siblings called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Nazareth House, Derry (In or around 1961/1962 - 1963/1964)

3. In or around 1961/1962 my [REDACTED] siblings and I were taken into care. I believe we were taken in to care because my mother was not able to cope with all of us. I think she possibly suffered from post natal depression. I know she was being prescribed valium. I found out after I left care that she had been continuously given various tranquillizers and had received electric shock treatment which only worsened her condition and she never recovered. My father was working as [REDACTED] in England as the company he worked for had a contract to [REDACTED] in England. However, at the time I thought we were being taken in to care because we had been bad.

PRIVATE

4. My sister [REDACTED] and I were taken away in a car and my other siblings were taken away in another vehicle. [REDACTED] cried throughout the journey but I could not cry and had a lump in my throat from the emotional shock of being taken away from my parents.
5. [REDACTED] and I sat in the foyer of Nazareth House on arrival and begged any adult who walked past to allow us to go home but we were made to sit down and be quiet.
6. Our father had bought us new clothes from going in to Nazareth House but these were taken from us and we were made to wear the standard "home clothes". I recall I was allowed to keep a holy medal which was given to me on my first Holy Communion. This medal was later stolen from me by one of the older girls who was in charge of my dormitory. This incident caused me great anguish as I felt this medal was my last material link to my previous existence. I kept it under my pillow at night. I challenged the girl who took it when I saw her wearing it at the dinner table but she denied stealing it and called me a liar. She became angry and had other girls and a nun hold me down on the flat of my back on the floor while she pinched my nose and force fed food into my mouth until I started to choke.
7. There were older girls in charge who bullied and abused us physically, mentally and spiritually on a daily basis. The nuns turned a blind eye, colluded or joined in with this abuse themselves. My memory of Nazareth House is that it was a terrifying, cold, impersonal and abusive place. I can no longer recall the names of any of the nuns who worked there at that time.
8. I tried to find my other siblings in the home. I found [REDACTED] in the playground confused and lost. She was about five years old at the time. I think there were about 400 children in the home at that stage. I found my four year old sister [REDACTED] in the nursery. She was stunned and freezing cold and later developed bronchitis. My brother [REDACTED] was also in the nursery but I was not allowed to see him. I later learned that he developed severe pneumonia. I was actively discouraged from visiting the nursery and beaten back down the

PRIVATE

stairs by the older girls in charge if I tried to visit them in the nursery. I cannot recall the names of these girls.

9. I agonised over being unable to locate my younger sisters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] at the time. I later discovered that they were regarded as special needs children and I did not see them until they left the care system.

10. I felt overwhelmed by the ordeal of being taken in to care. In Nazareth House I was constantly hungry, frightened, freezing cold and covered in scabies and head lice. It felt as if I had descended in to hell. There were so many children in the home that we had to take it in turns to use the same bath water which spread infection. Many days were spent after school picking head lice out of each other's hair. I recall on one occasion whilst picking head lice from my sister [REDACTED] hair she collapsed. On that occasion I also developed pains in my legs and was unable to stand or walk. I think it was from the shock of seeing [REDACTED] collapse. As I was panic stricken by my condition I was put to bed and left in a large dormitory with no help or medical attention. I was worried about what had happened to my sister [REDACTED] but no one ever came to tell me how she was. I was in the depths of despair and felt suicidal. I prayed that I would not lose my mind.

11. The regime in the home was to rise early, go to Mass, have breakfast, attend school lessons, have lunch and tea. Every stage of the day was accompanied by physical and verbal abuse.

12. The bed time regime was also frightening. The girl in the bed next to me made a heart wrenching pathetic noise every night which I found unbearable. I can no longer recall her name. The girl in charge and a nun would attack her and beat her for behaving this way and the situation never improved. I jumped out of bed one night and tried to intervene but the nun and the older girl then attacked me and beat me into submission. I cried myself to sleep every night and felt very tired and worn down by the regime.

13. I was never allowed to leave the home except to play in a large yard. I recall one day my sister [REDACTED] was hit in the mouth with the edge of a wooden

PRIVATE

plank which was being used as a type of swing. It left a lump on her lip but no one in charge was concerned about what had happened to her or got her any medical attention.

14. We were schooled on the premises and the teachers all seemed harsh, distant and cold. My sister [REDACTED] and I were in the same class. [REDACTED] was dyslexic and humiliated by being called stupid and verbally abused by the teachers. I felt helpless and unable to protect her, my other siblings or even myself.
15. We were constantly made to feel ashamed of ourselves, our bodies and our lack of knowledge in the home. I recall always feeling ashamed, dirty and profoundly unworthy.
16. When a priest visited over the Easter period we were told by the nuns to tell him we liked it in Nazareth House. I wanted to scream and tell the truth and say that I hated the place but I knew from past experience that it was dangerous to do this and hopeless not to conform.
17. I had complained on a previous occasion to a nun and was told to "stop telling tales" and after that I was a target for more bullying by the older girls. I do not recall the name of this nun.

Coneywarren Children's Home (1963/1964)

18. One day my sister [REDACTED] and I were moved to Coneywarren in Omagh. It had a better atmosphere as there were only about a dozen children in the home. I could not interact with the other children very well as I did not have the ability to trust them. I had forgotten how to play and interact and how to relax enough to trust this new environment. I was greatly relieved to leave Nazareth House as I was no longer punched or beaten but I still fretted about my younger siblings remaining there. I had a deep seated sense of shame when we were taken to school in a white van which had the words "Coneywarren Children's Home" written across the vehicle. There was a stigma attached to coming from a children's home and I thought it meant that I

PRIVATE

was a bad person because we were always told that if we were bad we would be put in a home.

19. After a period of time [REDACTED] and I were allowed home to look after our mother. However, I felt like a zombie and was hardly able to look after my mother when I still felt ill myself [REDACTED] and I both developed huge mysterious blisters on our hands. I discovered years later when reading about the Hillsborough disaster that this symptom may be linked to post traumatic stress disorder. I also developed a condition known as [REDACTED] when I was about nine years old. I was in Nazareth House at the time. I felt crushed and overwhelmed by my care home experiences and I was finding it hard to function both at school and at home.

Life after care

20. Before I married I completed RSA exams in short-hand, typing, book keeping and commercial arithmetic. I worked for [REDACTED] I was based in Belfast city centre in the late 60s / early 70s during the worst period of the troubles.
21. I married when I was [REDACTED] years old. My husband was [REDACTED] He was a mechanic with the [REDACTED] I moved to England when I was [REDACTED] We have been living in England for [REDACTED] years. We have [REDACTED] sons and one grandchild.
22. I worked in a public house for five years and then I moved to secretarial work and worked in a tax office and for a newspaper. I then went to work for a local priest. I have been working in that post for [REDACTED] years and have served three different priests.
23. I currently suffer from an underactive thyroid which I have read is more common among people who have been abused as children. I have recently been diagnosed as suffering from [REDACTED] which is another stress related

PRIVATE

condition. I suffer constantly from sore throats and I currently take medication for these conditions. I was sick for about twelve years and vomited continuously throughout this period but I was afraid to go to the Doctor as I did not trust people in authority. I was fearful that if anyone thought that I was unable to cope my children would be taken away from me. These symptoms continued for twelve years eventually leading to a breakdown in 2007 when I collapsed in the street in [REDACTED] I was found by the police, sectioned and taken to a psychiatric facility called [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] My relatives tell me that during this time when they would try to communicate with me I was often confused, not making sense, making religious references and was often not coherent. I remained in this facility for a couple of months but have not been sectioned since.

24. When I finally got the courage to speak to the doctors about my condition they tried to deal with it by prescribing anti-depressants. I refused to take these as I was terrified of becoming addicted to them and ending up like my mother or risk losing my children.

25. I developed a condition whilst in Nazareth House where my extremities were always cold, white and numb. I recall being aware of this condition from the age of nine onwards. In later life I discovered that this condition is known as [REDACTED]

26. I continuously worry that I have passed my insecurities on to my children and that my health difficulties and insecurities have made life difficult for them.

27. I reported my experiences in care to the PSNI on 8th January 2013. I do not think they were able to take the matter any further as I cannot recall the names of my abusers.

28. Throughout my life I have continuously struggled to contain and control all the damaging emotions I feel. I feel the whole experience had a very crippling

PRIVATE

affect on my siblings and myself leaving us vulnerable even as adults. I continue to struggle with low self-esteem and live my life in a state of constant fear and nervousness.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

HIA 394

Signed _____

Dated 21.12.13

PRIVATE

refused to eat the usual breakfast which consisted of porridge. The civilian worker refused to believe I was ill and she said to me 'you will eat'. Then she force fed me the breakfast. All the children at my table witnessed this. Although I was terrified I would be beaten, I could not prevent myself from vomiting all over the table. Instead of helping me the civilian worker started beating me about the head and screaming at me for making a mess. She then spooned all the vomit back into the bowl and insisted that I eat the vomit otherwise I would not be allowed to leave the table. She kept me behind while all the other children had left. I was so traumatised by this experience that I had problems allowing myself to vomit again for many years after that horrific treatment. I was never able to eat porridge after this. I still struggle with taking time off from work because I was made to feel guilty for being ill during my stay at Nazareth House.

10. The second traumatic experience I had at the home in Derry concerns the vicious beating of another girl by one of the nuns. I was in the toilets one day washing my hands when suddenly another girl came in with a nun at her heels. I do not know the name of the nun or the girl. When the girl was cornered the nun started beating her with a very thick stick from head to foot. She was beaten so badly that she was covered in blood and she was screaming and wailing like an animal in distress but no one came to help her including myself. I just froze on the spot and I remember feeling completely powerless, yet so guilty for not coming to her defence. It was like I was paralysed in that horrific moment because I knew that if I tried to interfere I would be beaten also. I was in survival mode. I felt so guilty for not helping this poor girl that I suffered from a recurring nightmare after that incident, and well into my twenties, that I was being buried alive.

11. My sister HIA 394 was like a surrogate mother to me due to my mother's prolonged illness and she had tried on several occasions to reach me on the second floor and come to my rescue but the nuns and monitors always prevented her from doing so.

12. Not everyone in the home was unkind, like any groups there were good and bad. I specifically remember a young nun who sometimes allowed me to warm myself

Ministry of Home Affairs,
Stormont, Belfast.

D/FC

Nazareth House, Bishop Street, Londonderry.

On the 27th of September we visited Nazareth House, Bishop Street, Londonderry, and were shown over the premises by Sister SR 24. We also interviewed Sister SR 9. Rev. Mother had just left for her annual vacation.

There were 139 children in residence, 4 under two years of age, 32 in the Nursery Group (11 attending school), 98 of school age and 5 over school age. Five girls are the financial responsibility of Co. Londonderry Welfare Authority. The children under two years of age were accepted by Rev. Mother as an emergency measure, as they are members of families accommodated in other sections of the Home. While we think Rev. Mother had probably little option at the time in accepting the children, this Home is not suitable for the care of children under two years of age. When we discussed this with Sister SR 24 she said they hoped to be in a position to discharge these children quite soon.

The majority of the children in residence attend the Primary School in the Home. Two girls attend Thornhill Secondary School and one Londonderry Technical School. One girl obtained her Junior Certificate examination in June. Two residents are the responsibility of the Special Care Authority. We think it is imperative that [redacted] be removed. She still has to be kept in the Nursery Group and it is obvious that her presence is detrimental to the welfare of the other children in the Home.

The children appeared to be in good health and well cared for, apart from one girl confined to bed, who struck us as being singularly apathetic and unresponsive. We were assured that she had already been examined by the Medical Officer, who was keeping her under observation.

Sister SR 24 showed us over the premises, which were in good order and pleasantly decorated throughout. A new school-meals kitchen and servery is being erected adjacent to the dining room. Rev. Mother General during her visit to the Home last year had recommended the dividing of the older girls into three groups. One sitting-room has already been furnished in a room formerly used as a classroom and it is proposed to build two further sitting-rooms between the new meals-kitchen and the school. The sitting-room already provided is pleasantly decorated and furnished and is equipped with television and radio. We think the provision of two similar rooms will be a great benefit to the children. Work has commenced on the building of the new chapel.

A. We inspected the statutory records. We were concerned that fire drill is being not carried out. Sister said she was awaiting directions regarding this from the local fire officer. We advised her to contact him immediately regarding this matter and we intend to make a further enquiry about this within the next few weeks. The "events of importance" book shows that the girls have enjoyed numerous outings and films during the year. Sister SR 9 also informed us that it had been possible to arrange for all girls of school age to spend their summer holiday with private families.

Although this is a large institution, improvements continue to be carried out to make it as homely as possible for the children in residence.

Signed HW my/s

Date 2/10/60

15

Derry 1960

SR 129

Senior

P.L.C. School

and C. Old Men

City Collecting

Children's Workroom

Church. Linen Rm. Parlor

Kitchen

Country Collecting

Old Ladies

Infant School

Primary School

Nursery

Collecting

Country Collecting

Girls' workroom

SR 111

SR 9

2.3

4. What are the age limits of children for whom the home provides?

	Minimum	Maximum
Boys	2	5
Girls	2	18

Under 2 if necessity arises.

- 5.(a) Are there any qualifications or dis-qualifications for admission?

Children must be mentally sound.

- (b) Is the decision to admit based on the information given by the applicant only? If not, what additional information is gathered?

Usually on a Priest's recommendation, or that of the Welfare.

- (c) Who collects and collates this information - a member of the staff; a member of the governing body; some other person?

A member of the Staff.

- (d) Who takes the decision to admit - the person in charge of the home; a local committee; or central office?

The person in charge of the Home.

- 6.(a) Where an application is not made on behalf of a welfare authority, is any contact made with the welfare authority -

(i) before admission?

If necessary.

(ii) after admission?

" "

- (b) Where contact is made with the welfare authority, what is its nature and purpose?

Where child is neglected by relatives or friends after being placed here.

- (c) In what circumstances would you regard contact with the welfare authority inappropriate?

Where Parents or relatives express the desire to have no such contact.

- 7.(a) What is the total number of children who can be accommodated in the home?

140.

- (b) How many were on the roll at 31st December, 1963 (including those who may have been temporarily absent on that date)?

Welfare Authority cases	Vol. cases	Total
		112.

- (c) Of those on the roll at 31st December, 1963, how many were:

(i) physically handicapped?

Welfare Authority cases	Vol. cases	If none at present would you normally admit them
None.	1.	In necessity
1.	9.	Yes.
1.	9.	
None	None	No.

(ii) educationally sub-normal?
and Class.
attending special schools?
not attending special schools?

(iii) ascertained special care?
and
attending day centres?
not attending day centres?

14. What opportunities are provided for quiet reading, homework, and/or hobbies? We have rooms set apart for these occupations.
15. In what other ways do the children spend their leisure? In cycling, skating, dancing, violin playing, games e.g. Table Tennis. Younger children have swings etc.,
16. (a) In the case of children discharged other than to their parents or relatives, what provision is made for after-care by -
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| (i) finding employment | We find employment suitable to their abilities and tastes. In finding lodgings we have very capable outside helpers. |
| (ii) finding lodgings | |
| (iii) visiting | |
| (iv) supplementing earnings? | |
- (b) Are these services provided by -
- | | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| (i) a full-time officer | |
| (ii) a part-time officer | |
| (iii) voluntary help? | Yes. |
17. Are your financial resources sufficient to meet your ordinary day-to-day expenses, and to enable you to employ all the staff you think should be employed, and to have premises adequate for modern standards of child-care? Yes.
18. Are there any desirable developments which you are unable to undertake for reasons of financial difficulty, e.g.:-
- | | |
|---|-----|
| (a) improvement of premises and staffing; | No. |
| (b) employment of a field worker to investigate applications for admission and after-care work? | - |
19. If your financial resources are insufficient, it would be of assistance to the Council if you would give information on the following:- Our financial resources are sufficient.
- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| (a) annual running costs of the home; | |
| (b) capital fund; | |

Derry, 1963

SR 128

Superior

D.C.

Chapel, Parlours

SR 9

D.C.

Children

Retired

Men

Pension Books etc

Linen Room, Laundry

Collecting

Ladies, Bells

san

Workroom, Girls

SR 59

St. Mary's Y. College

Kitchen

City Collecting

SR 90

Teacher

SR 61

Nursery

SR 58

City Collecting

Collecting (Driver)

TABLE B

Home	Capacity	Children accommodated on 31.3.65			Weekly charge to Welfare Authorities
		Welfare Authority	Voluntary	Total	
Dr. Barnardo's, Macedon	52	22	16	38	5 yrs. and over £4 0. 0.
Dr. Barnardo's, Ballycastle	22	5	12	17	Under 5 years £4 16. 0.
Blackburn House, Belfast	12	8	1	9	£5 0. 0.
Glendu Hostel, Belfast	35	28	-	28	£7 10. 0.
Victoria Homes, Belfast	33	22	4	26	£4 15. 0.
Nazareth Lodge, Belfast	2-5: 50 5-11: 102	29	81	110	£5 0. 0.
St. Joseph's Babies' Home, Belfast	120	11	56	67	£3. 0. 0.
Nazareth House, Belfast	128	31	88	119	£3.15. 0.
Nazareth Home, Portadown	13	1	12	13	£4. 4. 0.
Nazareth House, Londonderry	140	7	102	109	£3. 0. 0.
St. Joseph's Home, Termonbacca	90	9	79	88	£4. 4. 0.
St. Joseph's Home, Bessbrook	36	-	9	9	£1.15. 0.
Our Mother of Mercy Home, Newry	25	-	24	24	£1. 0. 0.
† Sacred Heart and Good Shepherd Home, Belfast	135	11	15	26	£3.15. 0.
† Good Shepherd Home, Newry	50	2	2	4	£1.10. 0.
† Good Shepherd Home, Londonderry	100	4	4	8	£2.10. 0.
De La Salle Boys' Home, Kilroubbin	80	32	43	75	£5. 0. 0.
Childhaven, Millisle	27	5	11	16	-
Johnston Memorial School, Belfast	24	-	15	15	£100 p.a.
Manor House Home, Lisburn	20	11	10	21	£5. 0. 0.
		238	584	822	

† Accommodation mainly for women and girls over 14 years of age

FEBRUARY 1965

36

1965

WEEK 8
(35-330)

DERRY

THURSDAY

4

SR 128

SR 9

Superior

1st L.C.

Children

2nd L.C.

City Collecting

Retired

Butsat

Laundry Linen-room

Church Parlours

Correspondence

Workroom

Ladies

Children

Caterer

Country Collecting

Nursery

City Collecting

Mens

Country Collecting

Children

Nursery

Collecting

Nursery

Collecting

Parlours

SR 59

SR 61

SR 58

Jan

MARCH | Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun | Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun | Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun | Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun | Mon Tue Wed