

Witness Name: **SR 295**

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922-1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **SR 295**Respondent Witness Statement to Statement of **HIA 124**
HIA 124 – HIA Ref 124**SR 295** will say as follows:-

1. I make this Statement in response to the above named Applicant's Statement to the Inquiry Into Historical Institutional Abuse 1922-1995 (the Inquiry).
2. The Applicant refers to having been resident in "Good Shepherd Belfast". The institution at that time was referred to interchangeably as the "Adolescent Centre" and/or the "Teenage Section". To avoid confusion, I refer to the institution as "Adolescent Centre" in this Statement.

Personal Details

3. I was born in 1941. I joined the Good Shepherd Sisters and I made my final vows in 1970.
4. I have a B.A. Degree (University College, Cork) 1967, a Diploma in Social Science (University College, Dublin) 1971, and a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (Edinburgh University) 1988, a Practice Teacher's Award in Social Work 1993, and a Post Qualifying Award in Social Work, 1998.
5. I came to Belfast in March 1973. I worked on a community development project in an economically and socially deprived area in the Lower Ormeau Road for some months. My work continued until October 1973 when I left Belfast to undertake further studies from October 1973 until May 1974. I recall that I was back in Belfast for a number of short breaks during that period (October 1973 until May 1974), and during those short visits I helped out with the supervision of the teenagers in the Adolescent Centre. In June 1974, I was transferred to Good Shepherd Sisters, Limerick, and I returned to Belfast in September 1978.

6. From September 1978, I worked closely with **GSC 21** on a part-time basis in the Adolescent Centre. **GSC 21** was in charge of the Adolescent Centre at that time. I understand she had a certificate in Residential Childcare Training. This was a State recognised Childcare Course which was run by the Home Office Central Training Council.
7. It is my understanding that the Adolescent Centre opened in 1970 in line with the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968. It is my recollection that the Adolescent Centre catered for school-going teenagers between the ages of 12 years up to around 17 years. It operated from the building which had previously been used as the children's home, called "Sacred Heart Home, Belfast. It was a beautiful red building with honey-coloured bricks surrounding the windows and doors, and was constructed in 1882. On the ground floor there were two large reception rooms where the girls could meet with social workers and visitors. **GSC 21** office was situated beside these rooms. There was a recreation room, one section was carpeted and had sofas, a TV, and a Record Player, while the other section allowed space for dancing, and general activities. There was also a dining room with an adjoining kitchen. There was a room off the recreation room with some desks where the teenagers did their homework.
8. I worked with **GSC 21** in the Adolescent Centre on a part time basis from 1978 to 1982. During that period, I attended all the six-monthly reviews in respect of each teenager in the Adolescent Centre. **GSC 21** and I were required to prepare a progress report on the individual teenager at the time of her review. This included a personal consultation with the girl in preparation for her review. These review meetings were chaired by the Principal Social Worker from Social Services or Assistant Principal Social Worker. Team Leaders and the teenager's primary social worker were present for these meetings. On some occasions the teenager would have been invited into the review process to share her views on how she was getting on, and on other topics of interest to the review group.
9. Over that time, I got to know **GSC 21** very well. I would honestly say that Sr. **GSC 21** treated the teenagers with great respect. She was very sensitive to their feelings and their emotional fragility. St Mary Euphrasia was the foundress of the Good Shepherd Sisters: her proverb was that "*a person is of more value than a world*". That was the core focus of our ministry. We tried to make each person in our care feel valued and important. Our work put at its heart girls who came from situations of familial abuse, neglect, or other complex situations. It was our role to provide them with a place of safety, good food, and a caring environment. We tried to

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- help the girls develop friendships, encouraged them to continue with their schooling and to rebuild their sense of worth, and assisted them with the healing process.
10. By way of practical example, the Good Shepherd Sisters opened a Youth Club within the Good Shepherd complex so that the teenagers in the Adolescent Centre would have somewhere to go in the evenings to socialise and engage in recreation. The Youth Club quickly developed into providing a much needed recreation venue for young people from the surrounding area. It created a safe space where they could develop friendships among peers from the community. There were discos, table tennis facilities, and space for varied activities at the Youth Club. In 1982, the Adolescent Centre closed due to a decrease in the number of teenagers attending.
11. **GSC 21** died in 1983 after a short illness.
12. In response to the Applicant's Statement I would like to say the following:
- (i) I recall the applicant, but I did not know her well.
 - (ii) I note that the Applicant was admitted to the Adolescent Centre in 1971, and left in 1974. From October 1973 until May 1974 I periodically came back to Belfast for short breaks and would have assisted in the Adolescent Centre on an *ad hoc* part-time basis. In September 1978, I was assigned to work in the Adolescent Centre on a longer term part-time basis.
 - (iii) I read the Applicant's witness Statement (GSC-2029) with a profound feeling of sadness. The Applicant clearly suffered great pain and mistreatment by her family in her early life. It was desperately sad to read. The familial abuse which she suffered was horrendous. No child should suffer that.
 - (iv) At paragraph 19 (GSC-2034) the Applicant states that **GSC 21** told the Applicant that the reason why she was in the Good Shepherd Sisters was that she was "a bold girl". I was very surprised to read this in the Applicant's statement, as this was not **GSC 21** style of relating to the girls; I found **GSC 21** always very sensitive to their emotional fragility.
 - (v) We were acutely aware that some of our teenagers came from very troubled family backgrounds. In some cases, their home life would have been abusive, chaotic, or chronically deprived. Some were very vulnerable. **GSC 21** gave them great support to overcome the difficulties they had faced. In my experience, **GSC 21** focused on positive re-enforcement messages with the teenagers, praising good behaviour and rewarding co-operation.
 - (vi) In paragraph 21 (GSC-2035) the Applicant refers to wetting the bed. It is important to note that the Applicant does not say that she was punished in

any way for this, nor was she humiliated. I expect **GSC 21** would have dealt with the matter discretely and with great sympathy.

- (vii) At paragraph 22 and 23 (GSC-2035), the Applicant relates to having collapsed and being admitted to Purdysburn Mental Hospital. Our record states "removed to Graham Clinic on the [REDACTED] 1974 after taking an overdose of tablets". I do not recall the event. This must have been a very frightening experience for the Applicant. If a girl had taken an overdose, we would have called for an Ambulance immediately.
- (viii) I hope that the Applicant felt that she was loved and respected when she was in the Adolescent Centre. I hope that the Applicant has drawn some healing from recounting her very sad story to the Inquiry. I hope that this process brings her further healing. I would like to wish the Applicant all the best in the future.

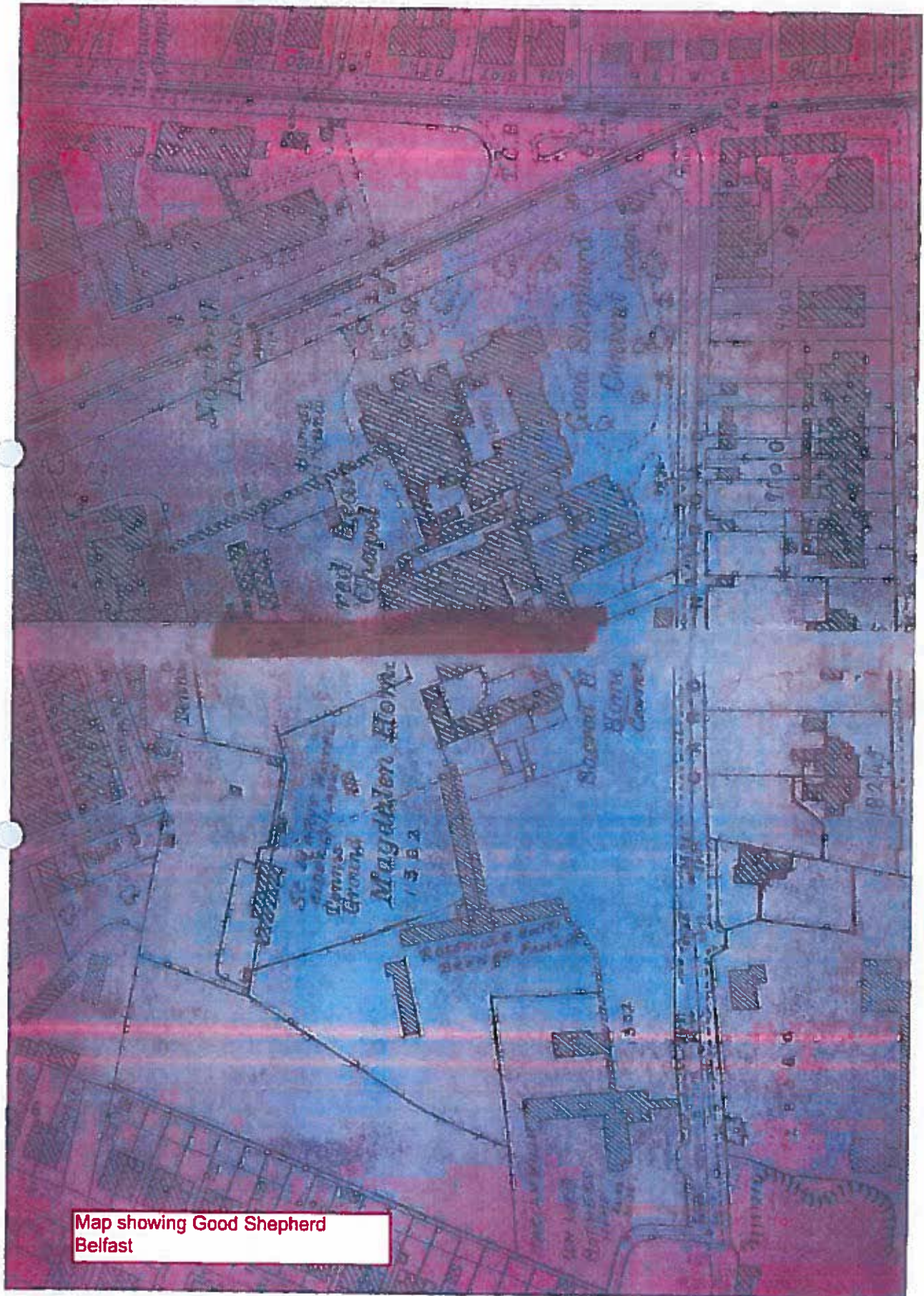
13. Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

Signed:

SR 295

Dated the 11th day of February 2016



Map showing Good Shepherd Belfast