

HIA REF: [ BM13]

NAME: BM 13

DATE: [6<sup>th</sup> June 2016 ]

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

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### Witness Statement of BM 13

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I, BM 13, will say as follows: -

1. My career history is as follows;

- I first worked at Bawnmore during the school summer holidays in 1974, when I was ■ years old, and was employed as a temporary Assistant Houseparent.
- I then obtained a permanent post as a Houseparent in around September 1976, aged ■ yrs.
- I subsequently moved with the unit to ■ Children's Home in ■, and left there in September 1978 to complete a CQSW at ■, qualifying in 1980. As part of the secondment contract with the Northern Health and Social Services Board (NHSSB), I returned to work in residential child care, initially at ■, returning to ■ in 1981.
- In 1983 I participated in a 'job swap' with a Social Worker from ■ fieldwork office, and left N.I. in 1984 to work as a Social Worker in ■.
- In 1985 I became a Senior Social Worker ■.
- In 1986 I moved to ■ as a Senior Social Worker to set up an inner city Intake Team. Between 1988 and 1991 I worked as a Senior Practitioner in Adoption and Fostercare, as well as a Guardian-ad-Litem for ■.

- Between 1989 and 1993 I also worked as an Approved Social Worker(ASW) (Mental Health) for [REDACTED]. Between 1991 and 1993 I was a Senior Practitioner in a Child Protection Team for [REDACTED].
  - In 1993 I returned to Northern Ireland and was employed by [REDACTED] as a Family Centre Social Worker until 1998, when the Family Centre closed and staff transferred to the newly created Family Proceedings Team (private law), which in turn became part of the Regional Court Children's Service in December 2008, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
  - I also worked as a Facilitator on the Men Overcoming Domestic Violence Programme, a joint enterprise between NHSC and Probation, between [REDACTED].
2. My recollection of Bawnmore as a Unit was of a Boys Home with children predominantly from the Rathcoole or Shankill areas of Belfast. No girls were admitted to the unit until the move to Ballyclare.
  3. It has been described as a Protestant boys home, and this was very much the case, whether by accident or design I do not know. Some of the children came from families with paramilitary connections, which the staff would have been made aware of both formally and informally. This created particular problems with the residents from the adjoining Bawnmore estate.
  4. The unit was located immediately above Bawnmore estate going up Mill Road from the Shore Road, such that one would be looking down on the roofs of the houses below. Bawnmore was a strongly Nationalist area, and there was regular friction between young people from the area and the children in the unit. Staff were required to escort the children on foot each morning and afternoon to and from the bus stops on the Shore Road where they caught buses to school, to prevent fights taking place.
  5. The Unit itself was a mixture of some quite young staff and a number of much older staff who would often talk of the days when the unit cared for very young

babies. The age range of the children was from around 6-8 years old to some of 17 years old, but mostly the older age range at secondary school stage.

6. My over-riding memory /impression is of a high level of aggression and sometimes physical violence between the children. There was very little interaction between the children and their families in the unit itself. Some children did go home either on weekends or for parts of summer holidays etc. However it would have been unusual for family members to visit the unit, even for meetings about the children.
7. Most of the professional meetings took place at Social Services offices, and were attended by the Unit Managers, not Houseparents. The children's allocated Social Workers would appear occasionally and take them out for a while, but I would not generally have had any idea who the children's SW's were. This created a sense of self-containment if not isolation within the unit, with very little contact with any other professional staff. I do not recall ever receiving any formal training for the post; advice and guidance would have been provided informally by more experienced staff members.
8. The type of children who were admitted tended to be boys only, from families mainly in Rathcoole, Monkstown and the Shankill areas of Belfast. They came from quite chaotic and often violent backgrounds, which were reflected in their approach to problem solving, and with a contemptuous attitude to formal education. Many had been and continued to be involved in truanting and minor offending, with occasional forays into more serious offending e.g armed robbery, which resulted in admissions to Rathgael Training School.
9. There was to some extent a revolving door situation with numbers of the children moving back and forth between the unit and Rathgael. The children were often well versed in Loyalist paramilitary lore and would have decorated themselves and their environment with flags and badges supporting their chosen loyalist faction.

10. My recall of the staff who worked there was BM 12 was the unit manager, his deputy was BM 26. BM 12 was more recently appointed, BM 26 had been at the unit since the days of the baby nursery, and this was reflected in the degree of control that existed depending on which was on duty. BM 26 was very well-meaning, and obviously cared a lot about the children, but did not carry the same authority with them as BM 12.
11. BM 12 usually managed to establish some kind of personal relationship with the children such that they would seek his approval, and he was therefore more able to manage and defuse situations. As a young staff member, I would have observed his approach and tried to model it.
12. I recall particularly two other staff, both much older than me, a male whose name I cannot recall but who was quite physically abusive toward the children as a preferred method of control, and a female who was known universally by her surname, even by BM 12 and BM 26. She was generally treated as a grandmother by everybody; even the more aggressive children would not use bad language in front of her.
13. The particular issues that caused most difficulty for staff to handle in Bawnmore were the violence and aggression from the children directed toward both staff and other children.
14. In relation to how staff dealt with bullying the general approach was one of observation and disruption. Some children were clearly identified as being very vulnerable to being bullied, while others were very aggressive and would take out their frustrations on the vulnerable.
15. A lot of time was spent on creating distractions for the children, breaking them into smaller groups and engaging with them in activities both in the unit and outside. The groups were designed to separate out the most vulnerable children and try to provide them with some respite and enjoyment from what was often a pressure cooker environment in the unit. BM 12 would often take one or two of the more difficult children out for extended periods.

Some of the other staff would take larger groups on outings, for example to the swimming pool .

16. In relation to my memory of the Applicant HIA 83, he was one of the children identified as in the vulnerable group. He was small for his age, had quite a 'bookish' appearance with heavy spectacles, and as I recall had some kind of speech mannerism (I originally remembered him as having an English accent?) which other children latched on to. He also had an unfortunate habit of getting into verbal exchanges with some of the more aggressive children, and then running and sometimes literally hiding behind staff for protection.

17. In relation to the allegation in his statement that ' I told BM 13 I was getting sick of the bullying and I felt I had to tell someone but he did nothing' I would say that I have no recall of any specific incident where this happened, but as indicated earlier this was one of the children staff would have identified as vulnerable and prone to being bullied.

18. As a general statement if this individual was to claim that he experienced bullying during his stay at Bawnmore I would have no difficulty in accepting that to be true, however it is also the case that this was an endemic problem within that environment affecting many children and is something that as a staff group we were fully aware of and did our best to manage

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

BM 13  


Signed \_\_\_\_\_

6<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Dated \_\_\_\_\_