

WITNESS NAME: ROBERT BUNTING

DATE: 23 JUNE 2016

The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse 1922 to 1955

ON BEHALF OF THE HEALTH and SOCIAL CARE BOARD

KINCORA

Exhibit 1

HIA REF: [ ]

NAME: [ Robert Bunting. ]

DATE: [ ]

**THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

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**Witness Statement of Robert Bunting**

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I, Robert Bunting, will say as follows: -

I was employed as follows;

- Social Welfare Officer Belfast Welfare Authority September 1964 – September 1965 South Belfast
- Seconded for professional training. University of Liverpool October 1965 – December 1966
- Social Welfare Officer North Belfast - January 1967 – September 1967
- Senior Social Welfare Officer (Team Leader) October 1967- February 1969 South Belfast
- Divisional Welfare Officer, West Belfast March 1969 – September 1971
- Children's Officer Belfast October 1971 to September 1973.
- Assistant Director of Social Services (Family and Child Care Services) Eastern Health and Social Services Board, October 1973 – February 1997.

**The role of the Health and Social Care Board, and of its predecessors in relation to voluntary organisations providing residential child care facilities from 1922 – 1995.**

**1. 1964 – 1973 Belfast Welfare Authority**

- 1.1 I commenced employment as a Social Welfare Officer on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1964. At this time the Authority had developed a scheme to recruit graduate trainees and second them for professional training. This initiative was long overdue, as in 1964 there were only two members of staff who were professionally qualified, namely the Deputy Chief Welfare Officer

and the Training Officer.

- 1.2 I was seconded for professional training on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1965, which I undertook at the University of Liverpool, as there were no professional courses available in Northern Ireland at this time. I obtained a post-graduate Diploma in Applied Social Studies with a specialism in Child Care and having obtained this qualification I was awarded the Home Office (London) Letter of Recognition in Child Care, which was required in England and Wales for employment as a Child Care Officer.
- 1.3 During my employment with Belfast Welfare Authority (BWA) I have worked in management as a Senior Social Welfare Officer (Team Leader), though I always carried a small caseload of the more complex cases, Divisional Welfare Officer for West Belfast and from October 1971 to September 1973 as Children's Officer with responsibility for all of the family and child care services in Belfast. Apart from my employment as Divisional Welfare Officer (West Belfast) 1969 – 1971, which unfortunately, for all but a five month period, included having to manage the emergency social services for thousands of families, as West Belfast was the area in Northern Ireland most affected by sectarian violence, (See Appendix 1 of the Schedule of Appendices, which should be read in conjunction with this statement), the main concentration of my work has been in the family and child care services. The other aspects have been in mental health services and services for elderly people with regard to more complex matters, such as formal admissions to Psychiatric Hospitals and assessment for residential care.
- 1.4 I began my employment as a Social Welfare Officer at a time when the purely voluntary contribution to the residential care of children was declining and had reduced from around 82% in 1947 to 32% in 1965, though this was still around twice as much, when compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. The Child Welfare Council identified the relevant factors in relation to this decline.
- 1.5 I think that another problem for the voluntary sector providing residential care was that it largely replicated the religious divide in Northern Ireland, similar to the education provision, and in the case of the Catholic sector, the residential care was provided by Religious Orders. This is not to imply that these Orders were not able to provide good quality care for the children, but there tended to be a substantial religious content in the day to day living experience and it was imperative to have lay staff to ensure the children's life experience was as close to family living as possible. Usually the complex, in which the children were living,

included a chapel.

- 1.6** In my experience the Catholic Church wished children who were admitted to care to be placed in Catholic residential homes or Catholic foster homes and we tried to comply with this, if at all possible.

There have been a number of occasions in my experience, however, when this was not possible and the local Priest objected to the placement, which put a lot of pressure on the parents.

The outcome of the Church's requirement, which was reinforced by Section 1.17 (2) Children & Young Persons Act (NI) 1968 (C&YP Act NI) and Regulation 7 of the Welfare Authority's Homes Regulations 1952, No. 130, to some extent: also by the nature of Northern Ireland society, was that the Welfare Authority and Board homes were, almost exclusively, used for the residential care of Protestant children.

- 1.7** Another problem was that residential care is part of a continuum of services for children in need, ranging from prevention to after care and independent living. None of the voluntary homes, apart from Barnardo's, had the infra-structure or resources to provide more than residential care for the children they were caring for and even Barnardo's could not do this on a long-term comprehensive basis. Before 1972, when I submitted my proposals to the Ministry of Home Affairs to reorganise residential care in Belfast (See Appendix 2 ) there was no overall strategy for Northern Ireland. I referred in this paper to the 1969 Children and Young Persons Act in England and Wales and the action which had been taken to develop a Community Homes System for residential care. However, in fairness to the Ministry officials, who I always found most helpful, particularly Mr Sterling, we did not have the legislative provision in Northern Ireland for this and reorganisation was already on the agenda.

- 1.8** We worked closely with the voluntary homes and hostels in monitoring the care given to individual children, for whom we had a statutory responsibility. While it was not a statutory requirement for Social Welfare Officers to visit the children placed in residential care, it was considered good child care practice in BWA to do so and it was included in our induction training. The role is outlined in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board: Submission to the Hughes Inquiry. (Appendix 1)

- 1.9** In addition, the only information required by the Ministry of Home Affairs was a quarterly statistical return on all those children in residential care who had not been boarded out (fostered) and the reasons for it. However, I don't know whether the Management

Committees of the voluntary homes were required to complete a similar return for privately placed children. This reflected the status of residential care in the legislation and the perception that it was second best. .

In 1967, Robert Moore, my predecessor as Children's Officer, decided to incorporate this practice in the Child Care Policy and Procedures and to include a minimum standard of at least monthly visiting, along with a three monthly review of the child's care and progress which would bring it in line with that for boarded out children. (See Appendix 3. There was guidance which accompanied this form, but I have not been able to find it. )

I think that the rationale for the Ministry not including this in the Children's Homes Regulations and Directions, was that residential care staff were employees of the Welfare Authorities and the voluntary homes and therefore subject to management supervision, while foster parents' were not employees, although they had to be approved by the Welfare Authority and would have gone through a more comprehensive selection process than residential staff. However, they were working alone in their own homes and consequently, did not have colleagues working alongside them, which was an added safeguard for children.

When I was appointed Assistant Director of Social Services (Family and Child Care) (ADSS F&CC) by the EHSSB in 1973, one of my responsibilities was to develop, review and revise the Board's Family and Child Care Policies and Procedures and I incorporated this policy and procedures in those of the Board.

- 1.10** The Senior Social Welfare Officers (Team Leaders) read and discussed these reports with the Social Welfare Officers and they were signed off by the Divisional Welfare Officer, before being forwarded to the Children's Officer. Practically all of our Catholic children were in Catholic voluntary homes when this practice, subsequently incorporated in policy and procedures, was in place during the 1960's and continued in the EHSSB in the 6 Districts. This meant that the Children's Officer had a considerable amount of information on the care of the children in the homes, which in the case of the Belfast Catholic voluntary homes amounted to practically all of the children.

This enabled me to raise any concerns which had arisen, with the Officers-in-Charge of the homes and if they were significant, also bring them to the attention of the Ministry of Home Affairs if necessary. (See Appendix 2 & 4 and sections 1.13, 2.44 and subsequent sections) I always found the Officers-in-Charge of the Belfast Catholic Voluntary Homes to be caring individuals, who were receptive to being informed of any shortcomings, but had difficulties

effecting improvements. I can recall occasions when I was at the Nazareth Homes and St. Josephs, when parents were visiting their children. They were always made very welcome and arrangements were made for them to spend time alone with their children and refreshments were provided. Usually, the shortcomings in practice appeared to be related to knowledge and training deficiencies. Also, inadequate staffing levels meant that staff were under continual pressure and were not able to give sufficient time to the individual care of the children, which is of major importance in meeting the emotional, social and intellectual, developmental needs of children.

- 1.11 In November 1971, just after taking up the post of Children's Officer, I had been introducing myself to the Officers-in-Charge of the Belfast Voluntary homes and also met with **DL298** who at the time was in charge of Down and Connor Catholic Family Welfare Society. I took the opportunity to discuss the need for improvements in residential care as I had decided that my first priority was to reorganise the residential care services in Belfast. **DL298** was very committed to child care and was involved with the Nazareth Lodge Welfare Committee which provided after care lodgings and support, including a club for boys who had to leave De la Salle Boys' Home (the Home) when they reached compulsory school leaving age. He had a lot of contacts with local firms and was usually able to find employment for the boys, if they were not continuing in education or training. I already knew **DL298** as he was involved in relief work in West Belfast.

I had high hopes that he would be able to make a start on improving standards, but unfortunately, due to lack of resources and having to concentrate on relief work, this didn't happen. However, when Miss A Corrigan was appointed Principal Social Worker in 1973 the social work service improved and subsequently, later on in the 1970's social workers were seconded to the homes (See CO memo to CWO in documents referred to in **Appendix 4**). In the case of the Home this would have been to support staff and help boys prepare for leaving the Home, as all of the boys were in the care of the Welfare Authorities from 1972.

- 1.12 My perception of the large voluntary homes in the 1960's, when working as a Social Welfare Officer, was that they were organised more like boarding schools, with the children having little or no private space, as the bedrooms were large dormitories. As Children's Officer I was aware that some of these homes had been operating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, before the Welfare State and those which were run by Religious Orders, although they were certainly much better than the Workhouses, appeared to have changed little.

With regard to the Home, which was established in 1950, it had implemented the Guidance in

relation to small group living accommodation, by developing a Cottage Homes System in 1968/1969.

It also needs to be borne in mind that the first guidance by the Ministry of Home Affairs to Statutory and Voluntary Authorities was not issued until 1952 some 50 years after the Catholic homes in Belfast had been established. However, this Guidance was very much child centred and covered the concerns which I raised with the Ministry in 1972, so it had not been implemented in 20 years.

- 1.13** In July 1972 I was alerted by Divisional staff that Nazareth Lodge Children's Home had been allowing couples, who wished to befriend or visit children, to take them out without any assessment as to their suitability. I contacted the Mother-in-Charge to express my concern as to what had been happening and wrote to her in July 1972, confirming that couples and families should be approved by the Welfare Department before children in our care were allowed out, even for day visits and asking her to notify our Department in these circumstances. I also informed the other voluntary homes of this policy and our Divisional staff.
- 1.14** I have been unable to find my record of this as not all of my files have yet been located. However, this issue arose during the Hughes Inquiry in 1984, as Nazareth Lodge was one of the homes investigated by the Inquiry Committee and my letter was included in our submissions to the Inquiry. Also, the Nazareth Lodge witness acknowledged that the Home's staff was aware of the policy.
- 1.15** When I worked as a Senior Social Welfare Officer (Team Leader), 1967-1969, supervising and supporting a team of Social Welfare Officers, any concerns which they brought to my attention were discussed with the Children's Officer. With regard to the Home, the only concerns, which I can recall and which we all shared, was its remoteness and the distance from Belfast, which made it very difficult for parents to visit. Travelling by public transport could take hours and most parents needed financial assistance to meet the costs involved. Sometimes the social workers took the parents with them when they were visiting. Also, the Home was registered in 1950 for 80 places, by the Ministry of Home Affairs and consequently had all the problems of a large institution. In addition, there was a secondary school for the boys, provided by the De La Salle Order, adjoining the Home. This had benefits, as most children in residential care have educational problems, but it also had a downside, as it meant that the Home was a self-contained community and this curtailed integration in the local

community.

- 1.16 The institutional accommodation was alleviated considerably in 1968/1969, when a purpose built Cottage Homes System was developed to provide an environment more akin to a family home, with separate living accommodation for groups of 12–14 boys in two double chalets. During the 1960's this home was usually well occupied and probably around 50% of the boys would have been from Belfast.
- 1.17 The Children's Officers in the Welfare Authorities were required under the Statutory Rules and Orders to inspect the Statutory homes and hostels at least monthly, with regard to the care the children were receiving and to submit a monthly report to the Welfare Committee. However, because of the Child Care workload in Belfast and the number of homes and hostels, a Home's Officer was appointed in the early 1960's, to undertake this requirement and prepare the monthly reports. These reports were informed by the weekly reports which had to be prepared by the Officers-in Charge and submitted to the Children's Officer, though this was not a statutory requirement and therefore unlikely to have been a requirement in the voluntary children's homes. They contained, inter-alia, information on the well-being of the residents. I continued these reports in the EHSSB with the reports going to the District Managers for the homes.
- 1.18 During my period as Children's Officer, October 1971 – September 1973, I never received any complaints from boys in the Home, that they had been abused in any way and none of the information in the quarterly reviews raised any issues. In addition, as this voluntary home was in County Down I had very little direct contact with the Brother in charge and the Assistant Children's Officer (Residential & Adoption Services) did not need to visit the Home as we had been receiving quarterly reports on the care of the boys since 1967. I was aware of shortcomings in practice in 1972 when Belfast Welfare Authority (BWA) was receiving all of the privately placed boys from Belfast into care, particularly with regard to ensuring continuing contact with their families and siblings who might be in other homes. However, this was now rectified as they were in our care and would be visited at least monthly. (Appendix 4)
- 1.19 Prior to this, from the mid 1960's the BWA boys were being visited by their Social Welfare Officers and Down County Welfare Authority had appointed a Social Welfare Officer a few years later, to liaise with the Home, with regard to the care of the boys. It would appear that she was aware of the shortcomings in relation to the care of privately placed boys, when **BR2** raised the possibility of the Welfare Authorities receiving these boys into care. Down and Connor Catholic Family Welfare Society (D&CCFWS) should have been

supporting the Home in relation to these boys. This was undoubtedly a major factor as to why I was expressing concern about their services. These shortcomings should have been identified by the designated member of the Management Committee, who had responsibility to inspect the Home, on at least a monthly basis, with regard to the care the boys were receiving. Unfortunately, the Home was not complying with this statutory requirement.

Further back in the 1950s it is likely that the Children's Officers visited the voluntary homes in which they had placed children, given the statutory requirement for them to inspect their own homes. However, I cannot recall whether this was the case, as it is prior to my employment with BWA. Also, the historical administrative files are not available at present, apart from my administrative file for the Home, when I was Childrens' officer, BWA October 1971 – September 1973 and ADSS (F&CC) EHSSB, October 1973 – February 1997.

- 1.20** There was no formal complaints procedure specifically in relation to children in residential care, in the 1960's and 1970's and this was not confined to Northern Ireland. It was assumed that if they had any complaints they would tell their social worker or Children's Officer / District Manager who was required to visit at least monthly to inspect the care of the children. This would have been the same for the voluntary homes with the visiting member of the Management Committee replacing the Children's Officer / District Manager. I was not aware that the Committee had not been complying with this requirement until the Hughes Inquiry.
- 1.21** As a Social Welfare Officer, I always discussed the child's progress with residential staff and any concerns they had expressed. None of the children I visited in residential care ever complained that they had been abused by staff and indeed, I would have been shocked if they had. My perception was that residential child care staff were work colleagues in child care, who were committed to providing the best care possible. Similar, to field social workers, they were in the work because they liked children and it was their vocation.
- 1.22** At this time even the physical abuse of children was not on the child care agenda of Welfare Authorities and was usually dealt with by the NSPCC. Child abuse first became a national concern in 1974 following the death of a young girl (MC) who was killed by her step-father, shortly after she was returned to her mother's care, from a foster home. This happened in England, but the four nations in the United Kingdom all issued guidance and in Northern Ireland the Boards developed multi-disciplinary and inter-agency procedures to deal with Non-Accidental Injury, a medical definition, as most physical injuries which children suffer are accidental. There then followed in later years, further guidance on emotional abuse, neglect

and most recently sexual abuse.

- 1.23** The sexual abuse of children did not come to national attention until the early eighties and has proved to be the most difficult form of abuse to identify and deal with.

A whole new body of knowledge has been acquired about this form of abuse and it has become a specialist area in child care because of its complexity. The latest form of sexual abuse to be identified is the sexual exploitation of young people; though this is not yet a criminal offence as it is difficult to prove and the young person has therefore to make a specific complaint about sexual abuse. However, an aspect of it 'grooming' which is possible to evidence has been an offence since 2008 in Northern Ireland. Also, 'Harbouring Notices' can be obtained to prevent young people from being in the company of people who may exploit them. The fact that sexual abuse continues to increase in 2014, even with our current level of specialist knowledge on paedophile behaviour, when we were not aware in child care in the 1960's and 70's that such abusers existed and were not amenable to treatment, confirms how difficult this was to detect at that time.

- 1.24** In this context, the identification of any form of abuse, in a children's home, by a social worker visiting a child, would have been highly unlikely in the 1960's unless the child or a member of the residential staff, told the social worker what was happening. This continued to be the case throughout the 1970's.

- 1.25** We now know, following the Hughes Inquiry 1984-1986, that particularly in relation to sexual abuse, children were unlikely to complain to their Social Welfare Officer / Worker in the 1960's and 1970's, and even less so in earlier decades.

In addition, as the Catholic voluntary homes were part of the Catholic Church's provision for children in need and the Church was able to exercise considerable control over its parishioners, it was most unlikely, that not only the children, but also their parents, would complain to the Welfare Authorities.

- 1.26** In Belfast Welfare Authority our monitoring was child centred, through the regular visiting of individual children and we introduced policies and procedures which ensured that their care and progress were kept under regular review, although this was not a statutory requirement and may not have been the policy in the other Welfare Authorities.

- 1.27** The information from these reviews was collated centrally and analysed by the Children's Officer which enabled him to raise any concerns arising in relation to child care practice and

the standards of care provided to the children in voluntary homes, with the Officers-in-Charge and bring them to the attention of the Ministry of Home Affairs, if necessary. From 1972 all of the boys in the Home were in the care of the Welfare Authorities, though they may not have been visited at least monthly and reviewed quarterly, in the other welfare authorities.

- 1.28** Father J O'Connor was Director of the D&CCFWS and D&CCFWS provided an improved social work support service to the Catholic Voluntary Homes from around 1977. The social workers who were seconded to the homes, liaised with the Districts' social workers, if they became aware of any problems in relation to the children.

With regard to the Home this service was discontinued around 1980 and does not appear to have been reinstated until 1981, following an inspection undertaken by the Department. This matter is referred to later in this statement.

Father O'Connor was also a member of the Home's Management Committee. In addition, he was a co-opted member of the Board's Personal Social Services Committee (PSSC), representing the Catholic Voluntary Sector.

- 1.29** The Ministry of Home Affairs was well aware of my views on the inappropriateness of large institutions for the care of children and of the need while they remained in existence, to ensure that :-

- the care was organised on a small group basis
- a team of qualified or in-house trained staff was allocated to each group
- the living accommodation was homely and reflected family life in the community, including involvement in domestic tasks

I have no reason to believe that Mr R Sterling, Mr Irvine, Miss Forrest and Miss Hill, with whom I liaised, at the Ministry of Home Affairs did not share my views and it would be surprising at that time if they did not, given the 1952 Guidance from the Ministry.

I received the wholehearted support of Mr Sterling, for my proposals to reorganise and improve the residential child care services in 1972, which was very helpful in enabling me to obtain the approval of the Welfare Committee to their implementation and also meeting the cost involved.

- 1.30** I considered it important to keep the Ministry informed as they had the statutory responsibility

for the registration of the voluntary homes and the power to supervise or inspect the care being provided. The Ministry would also have had to approve all of the residential child care staff appointed by the Management Committee, as this was the case for the Welfare Authorities. To obtain and retain registration, the voluntary homes had to meet specific standards with regard to the accommodation, care and management of the homes.

- 1.31 However, it was very difficult for the Ministry to achieve significant improvement in the large institutions, for reasons that have already been well rehearsed. Also, the increased demand for residential care during the 1960's and 1970's, directly related to the increase in the number of children coming into care and the difficulty in recruiting suitable foster parents, were important factors limiting the opportunities for change.
- 1.32 In the case of the Home, the Ministry provided a substantial grant for the development of the 'Cottage Home' units and enabled care to be provided on a smaller group basis. They may also at this time, have improved staffing levels, as more staff would be required to allow for the reorganisation of the care on a small group basis and in addition, it would have provided an opportunity to recruit more lay staff. This may be the reason why the Home had the highest per capita charge in 1972, as indicated in the following section.
- 1.33 The Ministry of Home Affairs, subsequently the Department of Health and Social Services, had specific responsibilities for the financing of voluntary children's homes with regard to capital expenditure and training of staff. The Welfare Authorities, subsequently the Boards, were responsible for meeting the per capita charge for children they had placed in these homes. In BWA the Finance Department dealt with these matters and liaised with me. Any increase in the maintenance charges was submitted to the Northern Ireland Association of County and County Borough Welfare Committees and the Association recommended the increases to the Welfare Committees. (See Appendix 4)

As already indicated the charge for the Home was increased from £14 to £17 per week with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 1972 and was the highest charge of any of the homes listed. This increase was back-dated to 14<sup>th</sup> May 1972, the date of the Welfare Committee meeting. These charges were not inclusive of all costs.

- 1.34 There is a section in Belfast Welfare Committee Minutes of 26<sup>th</sup> September 1972, relating to boys who were privately placed in the Home, being received into care (Appendix 4). At this time all of the privately placed boys were received into the care of the Welfare Authorities. The correspondence in this appendix is self-explanatory.

## **2. 1973 – 1995 Eastern Health and Social Services Board**

- 2.1** I was appointed to the post of Assistant Director of Social Services (Family and child Care Services) (ADSS (F&CC) )in the EHSSB, on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1973.

The adverse impact of the generic management structure emanating from reorganisation has been referred to in a number of papers and in the Hughes Inquiry Report. In my view and that of my colleagues in child care, this structure was fundamentally flawed, as it replaced the specialist, integrated, headquarters management structure for child care and substantially increased the risks for children. This was brought to the attention of the Department of Health and Social Services, during the consultation process prior to reorganisation.

- 2.2** Reorganisation created an imbalance in the size of the Boards, with the Eastern serving over 40% of the Northern Ireland population and consequently, requiring six Districts to ensure the effective delivery of the services. This increased co-ordination problems as resources such as children's homes had to be shared and were no longer managed centrally. In BWA this was part of Mrs Wilson's Assistant Children's Officer, managerial responsibility.

In addition, as it included Belfast, it had some of the most socially deprived inner city areas in Europe and during the 1970's was included in the European Union initiatives to address social disadvantage, in what were categorised as Areas of Special Social Need. The Department led this initiative in Northern Ireland and I was the Board's representative on the Working Group when the family and child care services were being considered. It was known as the Belfast Areas of Need Programme and finance was allocated to the child care services including residential care, as there were many disadvantaged children from these areas in children's homes and hostels.

- 2.3** These factors of size and social need meant that the Eastern Board had a Family and Child Care workload, at least equivalent to the other three Boards combined and this had a corresponding impact on my workload which meant that I had to work on average 20 hours of unpaid overtime each week. In addition, the headquarters of all of the main voluntary child care organisations and the majority of the services they provided were in Belfast (around 40), as was the D&CCFWS which provided support to the Catholic voluntary homes in the Board's area.

The Board also had the largest number of voluntary homes in its area (10) and was the main user of Barnardo's largest home, Macedon, which was just outside its boundary.

- 2.4 There was another important issue for residential care arising from this reorganisation. The Conduct of Children's Homes Direction was not amended until 1975 and the post of Children's Officer had been abolished in 1973, consequently, the statutory duty of a designated officer, to inspect the care of children in children's homes and hostels on a monthly basis, no longer applied. (Section 1.13 (3) of C&YP Act (NI) 1968 repealed by H&PSS Order 1972). To deal with this issue I incorporated it in our policy and procedures, which required the District Social Services Officer (DSSO), to submit a monthly report to the Director of Social Services (DSS).
- 2.5 When the Direction was amended in 1975 there was no mention of the ADSS (F&CC), as he had no executive authority to monitor residential care. The DSSO was included as he was responsible for the management and supervision of Children's Homes and Hostels. This is referenced in the EHSSB response to the Departmental evidence paper to the Committee of Inquiry. (See Appendix 5).
- 2.6 Prior to commencing employment with BWA in 1964, I had been involved in voluntary youth work and during my employment as both practitioner and manager, had worked co-operatively with the voluntary child care sector. When I was Children's Officer for Belfast I had contact with all of the managerial heads of voluntary child care organisations, providing services in the Belfast area.
- 2.7 I worked closely with the voluntary child care sector, following reorganisation, as Assistant Director of Social Services (Family & Child Care), but in a different capacity. While I was no longer the managerial head of the children's services, one of my responsibilities was to liaise with the voluntary child care and juvenile justice sectors (I also had to liaise with other statutory agencies providing services for children; the Courts dealing with care, juvenile justice, family law and adoption, the DHSS Child Care Branch with regard to legislation, policy, statistical returns, planning, submissions for resources based on assessment of need, reports on specific services when requested, and the voluntary child care sector; the Northern Ireland Office which had retained the responsibility for juvenile justice and included training schools and the juvenile justice voluntary organisations. This responsibility, as it included liaison with the DHSS and given the size of the EHSSB, and voluntary sector, amounted to more than a full-time job).

- 2.8** I played a lead role in bringing Home-Start Family Support Services for parents with young children under 5 to Northern Ireland in 1983 and grant aided the first scheme which was developed in East Belfast. Subsequently, I was the Northern Ireland representative on their UK Management Committee and Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee. I was also co-opted on to the Save the Children Northern Ireland Committee to provide advice from a statutory perspective.
- 2.9** In the early 1990's I was Chair of the Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency's Grants Committee which had been established by the Agency, as it had been delegated responsibility by the Department to administer the grant aid available to promote volunteering. I continued in this role following my retirement in 1997, to develop a strategy to implement the newly elected Labour Government's policy initiative to promote an 'Active Community' in order to repair the damage which had been done to community cohesion and development, by previous governmental policies promoting self-reliance and competition. The Committee was responsible for deciding which organisations should receive the finance associated with it, and the Department then set up a Monitoring Committee, which I chaired, to oversee the implementation.
- 2.10** The child care voluntary sector benefited considerably from these initiatives, particularly those organisations which relied almost entirely on volunteers to provide the service, as was the case for Home-Start.
- 2.11** Following my retirement the voluntary sector, co-ordinated by Home-Start, and supported by my former work colleagues in the child care services, including the DHSS, wrote to the UK Honours Committee, recommending that I should receive an honour for my services to the voluntary child care sector and I was awarded an OBE in 2000.
- 2.12** During my employment as an ADSS (F&CC), I had good working relationships with the voluntary sector and promoted a strategic, co-ordinated approach to the provision of services. This sometimes involved voluntary organisations having to take decisions and make changes which they did not always wish to do.
- 2.13** Perhaps the best example of this strategic approach was the pre-school services (now Early Years) in Belfast in the early 1970's. There were three main voluntary organisations and the Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroup Association, which represented private and community organisations providing these services. There were also three statutory providers, namely the BELB, EHSSB and Belfast City Council which had Community Centres used for

play provision. A strategic approach was required and consequently, I established a co-ordinating committee, with a representative from all of the providers, which I chaired. This committee eventually agreed to change the provision to a localised community development service in the most needy areas with specialist provision for children with special needs provided by the voluntary organisations and the Board. This initiative was referred to in a publication commissioned by Belfast City Council some years ago, as the first attempt in Northern Ireland to co-ordinate the provision of these services.

**2.14** This strategic dimension was problematic for some organisations, particularly the large Catholic voluntary homes during the late 1980's and the 1990's, when the need for the type of residential care they had been providing declined, and threatened their financial viability.

**2.15** With regard to liaison with the Voluntary Children's Homes there was an added dimension in that the Department retained the statutory responsibility for the registration, supervision and inspection of these homes, in relation to the standards of care required for registration. (See Para 42.0 of Appendix 6)

This meant that there had to be on-going liaison with the Department, if matters of concern with regard to the care of the children came to my attention. I will deal with the concerns brought to the Department's attention later in section 2 of this statement.

**2.16** When the Department amended the Conduct of Children's Homes Directions it did not delegate the registration of the voluntary homes to the Boards. At this time the Department sought the views of the Board and I met with the Districts' Principal Social Workers for fieldwork and residential care to prepare a response. I then attended a meeting convened by the Child Care Branch with the four Assistant Directors' (F&CC) to discuss the Boards' responses.

**2.17** As the Boards were the main users of the homes, we thought, on balance, that it might be best for us to register as we would be applying our residential care standards and the voluntary homes would have to meet them. However, there were practical issues with regard to ensuring consistency in financing the homes, across the four Boards and uniformity in standards; for example, I was applying Castle Priory standards in relation to staffing, while the Department's standards were lower. The Assistant Directors would have to have initially agreed and subsequently revised, when necessary, these standards as a group.

Also, with regard to the registration process, the Assistant Directors (F&CC) had no executive authority. This might have been dealt with, by a recommendation for registration to the

Directors of Social Services. The Department had still to discuss the issue with the voluntary homes and I cannot recall the outcome, though I suspect that the voluntary homes were opposed to it. The Department would still have retained its power to inspect the voluntary homes.

- 2.18** There were other issues relating to this amendment. I was strongly opposed to corporal punishment, particularly as it could be used as an explanation for the physical manifestations of child abuse. My child care colleagues in the Board were of a like mind and I took the opportunity to raise its removal from the Direction. The Department was sympathetic to my view, but considered it would be out of keeping with societal norms at that time. I mentioned the legal principle of 'parens patriae' and suggested that the State should be setting an example.

In the event it did not matter, as the Boards could decide whether it was used in practice and it had been our practice not to use it. However, it did not help the cause of the abolitionists, which I supported. Also, if different decisions regarding registration and corporal punishment had been made at this time, the physical abuse of boys at the Home might have been prevented.

- 2.19** Following reorganisation, responsibility for the on-going liaison with the facilities and services provided by the voluntary sector and community groups in their Districts, including voluntary children's homes and hostels, was delegated to the District Social Services Officers. The only exception was the per capita maintenance rates, as there needed to be consistency throughout the Board's area and indeed, across the four Boards. In effect, with regard to the operational management of the Family and Child Care, we had six Children's Departments, but without the HQ, integrated management, of the Welfare Departments.

- 2.20** The liaison at District level for all voluntary homes not just children's homes was undertaken by the Principal Social Worker (Residential & Day Care) services and he was managerially accountable to the DSSO. There was also a PSW for all of the fieldwork services including foster care and adoption. This complicated the liaison and co-ordination necessary within the Districts to achieve unified management of the Family and Child Care Services and is attributable to the generic management model introduced at reorganisation. With regard to voluntary homes and hostels, concerns about the care of children might come up the fieldwork management line from the visiting social workers and would have to be brought to the attention of the Principal Social Worker (Residential & Day Care) services and the DSSO.

- 2.21** As the Department was responsible for registration, inspection, capital funding and grants for staff training it would not have been usual for the Principal Social Worker (Residential & Day Care) to be in contact with the voluntary children's homes, unless he had received concerns about the care being provided or the Officer-in-Charge had contacted him about a particular matter. The DSSO is also unlikely to have had much contact, apart from introducing himself and a visit to see what resources were available in his District. Any concerns brought to his attention would be forwarded to the Director of Social Services or myself. (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 4)
- 2.22** These management staff would consequently, not have had the contact which the Children's Officers would have had, with the Officers-in-Charge of voluntary homes in their areas.
- 2.23** The voluntary children's homes were also in a different position to other services provided by the voluntary sector. They had been the main providers of residential care for many years, some for almost a century; there was always a demand for their services and they had been in a monopoly position, until the State Authorities began to develop their own homes in the 1950's.
- 2.24** The need for change in the Catholic voluntary homes, which emerged in the 1960's and 70's arose out of financial difficulties, particularly related to private placements. Their dilemma was that seeking state funding for all of the children in the home would undermine their *raison d'être* and their independence. In addition, the children would not be received into care unless this could be justified, as the policy of the Welfare Authorities and Boards was to keep children with their parents or relatives and prevent them having to come into care, if it was in their best interests. Also, care was not a free service. There was an assessment of the parent's income to see what amount they would have to contribute and the Family Allowance Book had to be handed in.
- 2.25** From my own experience I was aware that some of the children in the Catholic voluntary homes were from well known 'travelling families', who travelled around Ireland. Sometimes these travelling families would leave the children with the Sisters when they reached school age, visit them whenever they were in the area and at birthdays and Christmas and come to collect them when they reached working age. The boys would have been transferred to De La Salle Boys' Home when they reached secondary school age.

- 2.26** The planning imperative in the 1970's was to ensure the viability of the voluntary homes and increase the development of our own homes as there was a shortage of places for Protestant children. In the early seventies there was no opportunity to reduce the number of places in the voluntary homes and reorganise the accommodation to provide for smaller group living. However, it pointed up the need for more staffing in the voluntary homes if they were not up to Departmental Guidelines, which unfortunately were below the Castle Priory recommended levels which I had implemented in Belfast and continued to do so in the EHSSB.
- 2.27** During the period 1974 – 1983 there was an increase of around 45% in the number of children in care. I received a monthly statistical return from the Districts on all of the Family and Child Care Services. This was a requirement as part of our policy and procedures, so that I always had up to date information which I could use in my assessment of child care needs and in my general monitoring of the services. It was also useful in compiling the annual statistical returns required by the DHSS.
- 2.28** While this increase impacted on residential placements for Catholic and Protestant children early in the decade it did not affect the Catholic voluntary homes in the later 1970's. In February 1977 a 'Bed Bureau' was established in the EHSSB, to facilitate admissions to residential homes and save district staff having to telephone other districts and voluntary homes, to see if there was a suitable vacancy. (See Appendix 7) This was operated by North and West Belfast District. North and West contacted the other Districts and the voluntary homes at the beginning of the month, to ascertain the position and listed those homes where there was a vacancy. The position was updated during the month and the list amended, if necessary.
- The return for February 1977 shows the position at that time. It will be noted that only 2 of our homes had vacancies at the beginning of the month and one of these was Brefne Nursery, which we had hoped to close before 1977, but were unable to do so because of a shortage of foster parents and an increased demand for accommodation for babies of unmarried mothers' who had decided to have their children adopted and children under the age of two. The other home was our residential assessment centre and had only 1 vacancy. You will note from point 2 of my memo to the DSS dated 7<sup>th</sup> March (Appendix 7) that I thought 'there may be some leeway to reduce numbers and reorganise'.
- 2.29** By 1981 the number of residents in the Home had dropped to 29 on average and we were no longer the main user, as the number of placements had dropped to 10 boys. This reflected the general trend in voluntary homes which, unlike Barnardo's, had not taken account of the

changing need for residential care to be reorganised as the preferred form of care for specific children. (See Appendix 8)

**2.30** As a consequence of these changes I had been involving the voluntary homes in the Board's planning from the late 1970's (Appendix 8) and I certainly do not accept the criticisms levelled at the Boards in paragraph 15.0 of the Department's paper on the Statutory / Voluntary Relationship, as applying to the EHSSB. In addition, I was involved with the Department in discussions with those homes which had accepted the need for change, so they would have been aware that this criticism was unjustified. By the end of 1980 I had had discussions, which included District staff, with all of the voluntary homes in the Board's area, with the exception of the Home, as complaints had been received from North and West Belfast District. Subsequently, these concerns and allegations of sexual abuse, first brought to our attention at Headquarters by social workers in North and West Belfast District in April 1980, together with concerns brought to Mr A Morris' PSW (R&DC) attention by the Home's staff in February 1982, contributed to its closure in 1985. The information regarding this has been attached to the Witness Statements of the relevant staff involved. The Hughes Inquiry investigated all of the allegations relating to homosexual abuse. The North and West Belfast staff and also myself, were commended for the speed with which we acted, to refer these allegations to the appropriate authorities.

**2.31** During this period, we were able to reach agreement with the homes referred to in Appendix 8 as to what changes were required, both in the accommodation and how the care was organised. Nazareth Lodge reorganised along similar lines a year later.

You will note that we were involving Education and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in residential care, because of the problems many of these children had (Para 8, page 3 of the minutes referred to in Appendix 8). I had been doing this from my time as Children's Officer and continued, it as ADSS (F&CC).

You will also see that Barnardo's was at the forefront of residential care provision and I had discussed the BELB proposals with them. Subsequently, they developed an adolescent project (Tara Lodge) in Belfast.

**2.32** The type of residential care continued to change, in response to changing need and I continued to work closely with the voluntary children's homes and District staff to try to address the changes required in the residential care provision, in the Board's area.

**2.33** Following reorganisation I had continued the 3 monthly review process and I shared this with my colleague Assistant Directors in the other Boards. This meant that all of the Boards had the same policy and procedures for visiting children in voluntary homes. This was still not a statutory requirement, though the quarterly statistical return remained.

**2.34** In 1977, I took the initiative, when reviewing policy and procedures with the Districts, to improve this process as it was a paper review, which did not involve residential and social work staff meeting to discuss the child's progress and plan for his future care. Also, I was concerned that there were still some problems regarding who had the final say about the child's care.

I raised this with the Department and obtained their agreement to replacing the quarterly statistical return with a six monthly comprehensive review of all children, in care. The agreement of the Directors of Social Services and the Social Work Advisory Group (SWAG) was also obtained.

I drafted the policy and procedures in consultation with District staff and shared them with my colleague Assistant Directors (F&CC). This policy and procedures were implemented in the Board's area from 1<sup>st</sup> August 1977. (See letter to District Social Services Offices dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 1977 Appendix 9)

This improvement in the review process substantially enhanced the possibility of children letting staff know if they were being abused in any way, as their views had to be sought and they were given the opportunity, particularly older adolescents, to attend the review if they so wished.

**2.35** The same process with regard to the funding of voluntary children's homes and hostels continued after reorganisation. The per capita weekly maintenance rates were revised when the voluntary homes requested an increase, and were inclusive of all revenue costs, from the mid-seventies, when I took the initiative to rationalise the previous ad hoc funding arrangements (See Appendix 10). With regard to my commitment to joint planning, referred to in Sections 2.30 & 2.31, this was an improvement on my planning with individual homes, because of the competition between them. It also involved the voluntary sector establishing a Residential Sub Committee within Child Care (NI) to enable this joint planning to take place. Mrs Wilson, Barnardo's was the chair of the Sub Group in 1997 when I retired.

Capital funding and funding for training were the responsibility of the DHSS.

Appendix 10 indicates that having to meet 25% of capital expenditure was a problem for the

voluntary homes and along with increasing costs, was affecting their ability to make a contribution of up to 5%, towards running costs. At this time Father O'Connor was Chairman of Child Care (NI), an organisation established to represent the voluntary child care sector.

- 2.36 At some stage, the procedure in the EHSSB changed to an annual financial review. It would appear from the table showing Maintenance Charges (See Appendix 11) that this began no later than 1981. You will note from the documents referred to at Appendix 11 that we gave an increase of 85 % for the year ending 28<sup>th</sup> February 1981, which included improvements in staff salaries and because we were aware that salaries in homes and hostels usually amounted to 75% of the costs, the Home, along with all the other voluntary homes, received preferential treatment in relation to the cash limits set by the Department, the higher rate for 'other expenditure' being applied to salaries. By February 1982 salaries amounted to around 54% of the total expenditure of the Home, which indicated that their expenditure on staffing was below average and that staffing needed to be improved. The increase in 1981 also took account of the drop in occupancy level and related the per capita rate to the actual occupancy, while allowing for a voluntary contribution of £1,193, which meant that there was a net surplus for the Home. However, we were not able to sustain this in the succeeding years up to 1985 because of substantial increases in the actual expenditure for the years ending 1982 and 1984. Occupancy level was a matter of concern for the Personal Social Services Committee of the EHSSB and was discussed at their meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1981 when a decision was taken "to record that the Committee would not wish to subscribe to a view that if maintenance costs still rise because of falling occupancy that the Board should continue to pay the higher charges." (See Appendix 12)
- 37 The increase in February 1981 also included increased amounts for clothing, footwear and pocket money. This is significant as it post-dated the complaints about the allowances, which we had brought to the attention of the Child Care Branch on 24th November 1980. (See Appendix 13) I have calculated the percentages, but these can be misleading with regard to the increased expenditure on these items, as they relate to the average occupancy levels.

<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>Clothing &amp; Footwear</b>	<b>Pocket Money</b>
37 boys February 1980	£5,872	£3,586
29 boys February 1981	£10,863	£3,885
27 boys February 1982	£5,786	£4,976

The total expenditure on pocket money increased each year and with the drop in numbers, individual boy's pocket money had increased by 90% from £97 to £184 per annum by February 1982.

The total expenditure on clothing and footwear had increased significantly from February 1980 – 81 by 135%, but in the following year decreased by 43%. However, it was for 27 boys in February 1982 as opposed to 37 in February 1980, which meant that the individual amount per boy had increased from £159 to £214. Also, it appears that the expenditure in 1981 (£374) was designed to try to ensure, that each boy had a satisfactory wardrobe and consequently in 1982, one would expect a decrease in the total expenditure. It seems that either, the Management Committee took a decision to increase the clothing and footwear allowance in response to the complaints, or the Department asked them to, pending the inspection which took place on 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> March 1981.

- 2.38** It was the Department's responsibility as the registering authority, to ensure that these allowances were satisfactory, as they were part of the care standards the Home had to maintain and one of the recommendations, following the inspection, was that the Home should use the Model Scheme Allowances, which the Boards were using. It did not occur to me, until these complaints were made in 1980, that the Home was not applying the Model Scheme Allowances, as this Scheme had been developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (Department) and I thought that all of the Statutory and Voluntary Homes were using these allowances for these items. The Assistant Treasurer dealt with the financial aspects of the Income and Expenditure Accounts and brought any concerning issues regarding expenditure to my attention, before the new per capita rates were approved. The Homes' approach to clothing and pocket money appears to be part of the boarding school culture, which seemed to permeate the residential care provided by the Home. However, it is surprising that the Brothers were so frugal, as the per capita rates were now inclusive and they only had to make a contribution of 5%, depending on their financial circumstances, which would have amounted

to less than £10,000 in 1982. Also, all of the voluntary homes were given priority by the Department and EHSSB at the end of the financial year, when 'slippage' finance was available, to enable them to clear any deficits.(see Appendix 14)

- 2.39 I do recall visiting the Home a few years prior to the Home closing, when finance was discussed, but this may have been part of a wider discussion about the Home's future. I think that the Brother-in-Charge and Father McCann, who was the Chairman of the Management Committee, were at these meetings. I also visited the Home when new members were appointed to the PSS Committee, and were visiting all of the voluntary children's homes in the Board's area, as I knew the Officers-in-Charge and to answer any questions they might have about the Homes.
- 2.40 This Committee took a particular interest in residential care. Some of the members were concerned about the cost of residential care and thought that our homes were of a higher standard than working class housing. Allowances such as pocket money were scrutinised and compared with what their own children received and this led to them querying the rationale for the allowances. The Ministry of Home Affairs had developed a Model Scheme for the Boarding Out of Children. This scheme, inter-alia, included clothing and pocket money allowances, which were age related and were updated each year by whatever percentage the Ministry/Department allowed. These Model Scheme allowances were applied with regard to children in residential care.
- 2.41 The four Board Assistant Director (F&CC) Group, which I chaired, had responsibility for reviewing the foster care allowances annually, and made improvements to the Model Scheme, if necessary, with the approval of the Child Care Branch of the Department. I took the opportunity to change the payments we made for pocket money, clothing e.t.c. and bring them in line with the annual UK Family Expenditure Survey. The amounts were higher than the Model Scheme rates but were accepted as there was a clear rationale for them. This of course was insignificant compared with ensuring that there were sufficient well qualified care staff, to meet the children's emotional and social needs. I am not certain when this change took place, but it was probably post 1985, when the Home closed.
- 2.42 The supervision of the care children were receiving in voluntary homes continued in line with Belfast Welfare Authority policy and this was improved in 1977 with the introduction of comprehensive six monthly reviews. However, the information coming out of this process was now collated at District level, as the Assistant Directors (F&CC) were not involved in operational management. If there were any matters of concern in relation to voluntary homes,

they would usually have been brought to our attention at Headquarters for advice or action and I would have taken them up with the Department if necessary, but I did not have the oversight which I had as Children's Officer.

- 2.43 With regard to the Home, there were 43 boys from the EHSSB resident in the Home, which allowing for family groups, would have meant that over 35 social workers were visiting on a regular basis. The number of boys had dropped to 10 by 1981 and by this time an after care hostel had been established at 44 Springfield Road by Down and Connor After Care Committee, with substantial financial support from North and West Belfast District, as practically all of the boys at this stage from the EHSSB, were in the care of that District. An after care worker may have been visiting and it would appear that Mrs A O'Kane was the Social Worker attached to the Home at this time, as she was involved with **DL517** North and West Belfast District, in preparing boys for leaving the Home.

- 2.44 During the early 1980s complaints were made by boys from North and West Belfast and the Home's staff to Board staff. The records with regard to these are largely self-explanatory and have been forwarded as Witness Statements and attachments by the relevant staff.

I would, however, wish to comment on Mr J Wilde's letters of the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1980 and 26<sup>th</sup> January 1981 with regard to the action I took. (See Appendix 15)

- 2.45 I followed my usual practice of bringing concerns to the Department's attention and confirmed them in writing in a letter of 20<sup>th</sup> November 1980, which Mr Gilliland signed. It appeared to me from these concerns that the Home was being run like a boarding school, but was not in accord with the 1952 Guidance in relation to large residential care institutions, which had education as an additional service. I suggested that the Department should contact me to discuss the matter further, with a view to agreeing what action should be taken.

- 2.46 I was somewhat surprised when we received a letter dated the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1980, from Mr J Wilde, Chief Social Work Adviser, implying that the Senior Social Worker who had received the complaints, should have started to investigate these with the Officer-in-Charge, rather than bring them to the attention of the District Manager responsible for liaison with the Home or the DSS at Board Headquarters.

Social workers, visiting the children they were responsible for, might bring concerns expressed by these children to the attention of the Officer-in-Charge or the Social Worker attached to the home, if there was one. However, it would not have been a realistic or appropriate expectation that they should investigate these complaints. Information was also

requested from the Board which SWAG and the Child Care Branch should already have been aware of. I think that Mr Gilliland telephoned Mr Wilde following receipt of this letter to let him know our views on the matter.

- 2.47 This was followed by a further letter of the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1981 (document 2 of Appendix 15) which indicated a substantial difference of opinion with regard to the Department's responsibilities for the standards of care in the Home and in my opinion was not in accord with Section 129 of the C&YP Act (NI) 1968. Also, there was an apparent lack of awareness of the policy and procedures, which the Board had in place to ensure that children in voluntary homes were receiving the best care possible. This was particularly surprising, as the policy to visit children was still not a statutory duty and I had initiated the six monthly review process, which had the approval of the Department, including SWAG and the other Boards, to its introduction. (Appendix 9). Also, SWAG had reviewed its implementation in some Districts, on the understanding that this would be a one off review, as this was not a statutory requirement. In addition, Mr Wilde seems to have missed the point that these concerns applied to all of the boys in the Home, not just those in the care of the EHSSB.
- 2.48 This letter was copied to Mr Kirkpatrick, Child Care Branch, who appears not to have agreed with the views expressed and paragraph 42.0 of the Statutory / Voluntary Relationship 1985 contradicts Mr Wilde's views on the Department's responsibilities. (Appendix 6). Mr Kirkpatrick was the Principal Officer in the Child Care Branch and would usually have been with the Assistant Secretary at any meetings the ADs (F&CC) had with the Department, regarding voluntary homes and other child care matters, such as policy and planning.
- 2.49 Mr Gilliland and I were quite annoyed by this letter and regarded it as an exercise in self-defence, as SWAG had not undertaken the inspectorial role of the former Child Care Inspectors, in any meaningful way, although the power to do so had been retained in the amended C&YP Act (NI) 1968 (Section 168).
- 2.50 There is a note on the letter to Mr Coulson, Deputy Principal Officer, which indicates that SWAG would undertake an inspection of the home from 9<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> March 1981. This indicates that the Child Care Branch had been discussing with SWAG, what action they should take. This matter along with the other complaints and allegations in 1980 of sexual abuse in homes and hostels appears to have sparked the Department into action and a programme of inspections followed.
- 2.51 At the time the complaints and allegations with regard to De La Salle Boys' Home were made,

I was liaising with the Police, at their request, and with the approval of the Board, to provide them with appropriate records relating to their investigation, into the sexual abuse of boys at Kincora Hostel.

- 2.52 Also, following the allegations of abuse I had obtained these relevant records regarding Kincora from the District and identified allegations and suspicions which had not been brought to our attention at Headquarters. I immediately brought these to the attention of the Police and Mr Gilliland, DSS. I also obtained the 'Mason file' from Mr Scoular (District Social Services Officer) as the Police had apparently lost the copy they were given in March 1976, in their internal mail system. This enabled the Police to identify quickly, the former residents they should interview first.
- 2.53 I was concerned that this might have happened in other Districts and checked to confirm that it had not. I also suggested to the Director, that we should introduce a procedure for immediate referral to him of any allegations of abuse by residential staff. He put this on the agenda for the Director's Team Meeting and followed it up with a memo on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1980. (See Appendix 16) This procedure was therefore in place before Mr Sharpe's referral. It was introduced as an additional safeguard, as DSSOs had been required from 1973, to bring any matters of concern, arising in residential care, to the attention of the Director.
- 2.54 With regard to the Police Investigation that was carried out in relation to allegations, current and former residents, had made to social workers in North and West Belfast District, in 1980, Mr R Sharpe (District Social Services Officer, North & West Belfast District) arranged with the Police for two of his staff – **DL515** and **[REDACTED]** to sit in at the Police interviews with the boys to support them. The late Sergeant Wilson, a man for whom I had the highest regard, and who was tragically killed some years later in a Provisional IRA bomb explosion in Londonderry, was in charge of this investigation and was liaising directly with the District, but kept me informed.
- 2.55 He contacted me for advice when arrangements were being made to interview the boys as the social workers had raised the need for them to be present when the boys were being interviewed.

Most of the boys who were to be interviewed had little or no family support and he was concerned about their vulnerability. Also, it seemed that some of them had been engaging in homosexual activities and would not be aware of the legal consequences.

2.56 We were both aware of the provision in the child care legislation with regard to criminal responsibility and the 'doli incapax', rule which makes a distinction between 10–13 year olds and 14 years +, in relation to criminal offences and knowledge of right and wrong, for children aged 10-13 years. This meant that any boy aged 13 years and under ought to have a social worker or parent in a supportive role and given the vulnerability of the older boys a judgement needed to be made as to their emotional state. Also, those who had engaged in homosexual activities would need a social worker because of the legal implications.

2.57 In the event all of the boys at the home apart from 2 were interviewed and DL515 and [REDACTED] were present for all of the interviews.

2.58 With regard to the complaints forwarded by Mr Sharpe on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1980 I have not been able to find any record of what action I took. I have no clear memory of it and my practice is not to speculate, if that is the case.

It is clear from DL517 report that BR 45 could not be identified, that BR 77 was physically abusing boys and that it was brought to BR 1 attention. Mrs Maria O'Kane was the Social Worker from Down and Connor attached to the home and Father O'Connor should have been informed about it. Consequently the Management Committee should have suspended BR 77 and reported it to the Police and the Child Care Branch. Allegations were first made to DL517 on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1980 and then subsequently, on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1980 to both DL517 and [REDACTED]. DL517 and [REDACTED] discussed these allegations with BR 1. BR 77 had already been reprimanded by BR 1 and made apologies to the boy for the incident and to all the boys for his general behaviour. His promise that it wouldn't happen again didn't last. DL517 and [REDACTED] discussed the allegations with BR 1 in more detail. His response was that he had dealt with them and there had been no further incidents. I am aware from the Hughes Inquiry that [REDACTED] did inform Father O'Connor of allegations and that he took timely and appropriate action but that Father McCann did not. However, I am not sure whether it was in relation to these allegations or earlier ones.

2.59 I think that DL517 and [REDACTED] are to be commended for the efforts they made to have BR 77 dealt with and protect the boys. However, it demonstrates why social workers cannot be expected to deal with such serious matters which affect the care of all of the children in a home and that they must be reported immediately to Senior Management

and the Police.

- 2.60** At the time these complaints were received at Headquarters. I had already notified the Police on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1980 about complaints regarding [REDACTED] **BR 77** and a Police investigation was underway. I was at this time liaising with the late Sergeant Wilson, as was Mr Sharpe. During the interviews complaints were made by boys, and he was charged with assault occasioning actual bodily harm to three boys.
- 2.61** I brought further complaints to the attention of Superintendent Caskey on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1982 and confirmed these in writing to the Chief Constable through Mr Gilliland, on the same date. However, I have not been able to find any other records, apart from a letter from Superintendent Caskey on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1982, informing me that the Director of Prosecutions had directed no prosecution. These records would have been submitted to the Hughes Inquiry.
- 2.62** With regard to the allegations (February 1982) to Mr Morris PSW (R&DC) North Down and Ards District, I immediately telephoned Mr Armstrong at the Department and followed it up with a letter of confirmation from Mr Gilliland, enclosing a report from Mr Morris, which is included with this statement. I was aware that SWAG had carried out an inspection and requested a copy of the report. It subsequently transpired that inspection reports were confidential to the Management Committee of the voluntary homes and when a request was made to the Management Committee of the Home, to share the report with the Boards, the Committee refused to do so.
- 2.63** This was the fourth occasion on which I had received complaints and allegations about the Home and the last complaint was particularly worrying, as the Department had carried out an inspection in 1981. I consequently thought it was advisable to put an embargo on any new admissions until we knew the outcome of the complaint. Mr Gilliland agreed and I notified our Districts. The Brother-in-Charge was informed of the Board's decision and the reasons for it. As this was a voluntary home I put the onus on the Department to notify the other Boards, but I don't know if this happened.
- 2.64** We received Mr Armstrong's account of the report of Mr Walker, SWAG on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1982, some six weeks after our referral. It indicated that the Officer-in-Charge of Chalet 1 had a serious drink problem and would have required treatment, but was allowed to continue in the role, with certain restrictions, by [REDACTED] **BR 2** It was not clear how long this continued, but called into question [REDACTED] **BR 2** handling of this risk to the boys. Brother

**BR 2** account was also the opposite to that of the staff who made the allegations and it appeared that Mr Armstrong had accepted his recollection of events. Also, the complaints had been brought to the attention of Father McCann and Father O'Connor. Their alleged responses were very concerning and there was no reference, as to whether they had been interviewed by Mr Walker. It also begged the question, why these practices had not come to light during the inspection. However, it contained an assurance that the practices in Chalet 2 had been stopped, but not until the Department indicated that they were unacceptable and **BR 2** had refused to change these practices, when they were brought to his attention by the two staff members. A meeting was arranged with representatives from the Home, the Department and the Board for the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1982. (See Appendix 17 of the Schedule of Documents)

- 2.65 There was criticism of the way the Board imposed the embargo, in that I did not consult properly with the Officer-in-Charge and consequently the Home had been unfairly treated. Father McCann wrote officially to the Chairman of the Board complaining about this matter and the letters in Appendix 18, are self-explanatory (See Appendix 18). However, consultation would have had no effect on the Board's decision, as the matter had been brought to our attention by members of the Home's staff. Also, **BR 2** had overall managerial responsibility for these staff, and the child care practice and procedures, so he should have known about these practices.
- 2.66 I was, of course, also aware of the previous concerns about practice brought to Brother **BR 1** who gave false assurances to social workers and was himself investigated for indecent assault on boys (April 1981). He escaped prosecution because he was allegedly terminally ill, and had been moved to Dublin by the Order. I was given to understand, some years later, that he was still alive, and that he had made a good recovery.
- 2.67 This criticism was not of any concern to me as I acted in the best interests of the boys and indeed, if it had been a Board home would have recommended the suspension of the staff involved, until the matter was investigated. However, this was a matter for the Management Committee and the Department.

The welfare of children had always been my most important consideration and I had made child care my vocation, instead of teaching, in order to try to improve the life chances of disadvantaged children. This was a decision I made after completing my post-graduate Diploma in Education at Queens. It was clear during my studies from all the educational research, that the effects of disadvantage started early in childhood and was the reason why I

invested a great deal of effort in improving early years services in the Board's area (Appendix 19) and changing them strategically to provide a service for all of the disadvantaged children in local communities. Also, why I had been keen to bring Home-Start to Northern Ireland.

2.68 While Mr Gilliland was being diplomatic about the future of the Home and did not wish to pre-empt any further discussions with the voluntary homes, it was likely, that with the changes which had already taken place in the Belfast Catholic voluntary homes (mixed sex, wider age range, small group care) and the development of the Home's after care hostel in West Belfast, that it would not continue to be used by our Board in the longer term. In the further discussions which took place, it became clear that with the decreasing numbers, the secondary school was no longer viable and the residential care provision was likely to be reduced to, two Chalets at most. This would not have been a satisfactory environment for the boys, in such a large complex, and consequently closure was inevitable.

2.69 I have already referred to child protection in general terms earlier in this statement. In 1975 when the DHSS issued its circular on non-accidental injury to children, I had already had discussions with District staff and was in the process of preparing procedures. I drafted the policy and procedures on a multidisciplinary and interagency basis in consultation with health services staff at Headquarters; District staff; other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector (NSPCC).

2.70 Training was organised within the Districts and in other statutory agencies such as Education, as well as the voluntary sector, to facilitate the implementation of the procedures. I participated in this training when appropriate, for example, I was the speaker at the annual weekend conference for Northern Ireland General Medical Practitioners when non-accidental injury was the main subject on the agenda and also spoke at the EHSSB General Practitioners annual conference.

2.71 The emergence of child abuse completely changed the provision of the family and child care services as it had to be given top priority by all child care staff and skewed the resource allocation towards child protection, as it increased over the years, which meant there was less for care and prevention. I still tried to ensure in our plans that the family support services, particularly the early years services, received an equally high priority and justified it as part of our strategy to prevent abuse occurring and if it did, to ensure that it would be identified at the earliest opportunity. In addition, these services helped to reduce the number of children having to be received into care and ensured that they were returned to their parents' care at

the earliest opportunity.

- 2.72** It also involved a steep learning curve for all practitioners working with children and particularly for social workers, who had the statutory responsibility for the protection of children. In addition, working in child protection was very stressful and this was exacerbated by public inquiries into the deaths of children. Social workers felt they were in a 'catch 22' situation no matter what they did. It was unusual for a year to go by without at least one public inquiry in the UK and of course this continues up to the present day. I understand that the current timescale for practitioners working in Child Protection is 3 - 5 years because of the stress involved.
- 2.73** The Department issued further circulars in 1978 and 1989 which the Inquiry is already aware of. The latter circular included for the first time, guidance in relation to sexual abuse. A Programme Planning Team (PPT) for children and young persons, (child care and child health) had been established by the EHSSB in October 1975 and I had been appointed Chairman. This was around the time that the NAI procedures were being finalised and the PPT was involved in coordinating the training and implementation. The PPT also updated the Board's policy and procedures and training in relation to the 1978 Guidance. Subsequently, this became the responsibility of the Area Child Protection Committee, for the 1989 Guidance.
- 2.74** While guidance from the Department on sexual abuse was not available until 1989, following the allegations of the sexual abuse of boys and young men (15/16 – 21 year olds) by staff at Kincora Hostel, in 1980, the PPT decided to draft procedural guidance for staff on sexual abuse. As we had no guidance in Northern Ireland, I contacted a friend, who was an ADSS (F&CC) in Lancashire, but they had no guidance either. We consequently included sexual abuse as an additional category in our procedures and added it to the Board's Central Child Protection Register.
- 2.75** The 1989 Guidance led to the Boards establishing Area Child Protection Committees. Initially, these were chaired by the Directors of Social Services. However, in the Eastern Board, shortly before Mr Moore's retirement in 1995, I took over the chairing role and continued in this role until I retired in 1997.
- 2.76** The DHSS Regional Strategy for the Health and Social Services 1992-1997 included an objective for Boards to "start work to secure in the longer term, access to evaluated treatment programmes for child and adolescent abusers". We had already been operating a similar programme for a number of years prior to 1992 because of the peer abuse at Kincora Hostel

and the Home.

- 2.77** In 1988 the Board established a Centre for child victims of sexual abuse. Miss Nicholl (PSW) (FS) South Belfast District and formerly one of my Assistant Children's Officers in BWA, raised this with me, at one of the meetings which I held regularly with the PSW's (FS), to discuss the aspects of the services which I was responsible for, such as policy and planning and I obtained the approval of the PPT to its development. This Centre was staffed with a senior social worker and a doctor both of whom were specialising in dealing with victims of child sexual abuse and was the first of its kind in Northern Ireland. This Centre while located in South Belfast served the whole of the Board and on occasions, depending on workload, accepted referrals from other Boards.
- 2.78** In the Board's South Belfast District in 1982, we established a post at Assistant Principal Social Worker level, in order to treat sexual abuse as a specialism within child care. This Assistant Principal had a Board wide remit in relation to advice, support, training and development. In addition training programmes with regard to sexual abuse, which included bringing experts such as the late Ray Wyre, over from England, were given priority by our Central Training Unit. These were made available to the voluntary sector including the residential care sector.
- 2.79** I liaised with the new voluntary organisations which had been established to help deal with the sexual abuse of children. For example, I was responsible for co-ordinating the four Boards input to the launch of Childline in Northern Ireland in 1986. This included manning the telephones, which had been put in place to deal with calls from the victims of child sexual abuse and agreeing the liaison arrangements between this voluntary organisation and the four Boards.
- 2.80** The Board's procedures specifically outlined the roles of practitioner and management staff and the action they had to take. In addition, all of the services we developed were available for children and young persons in residential care, including voluntary homes. As the Committee is aware both, in Kincora Hostel and the Home there was alleged homosexual activity taking place between some of the residents and in the case of the latter Home, this was substantiated following a Police investigation; something which I don't think was referred to in the case of the Home, in the Hughes Inquiry Report, but is mentioned in relation to Kincora. As already indicated in section 2.76, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Service developed programmes for young people who had been involved in peer sexual abuse. This

service was also made available to other Boards, depending on workload.

- 2.81 In 1977 children going missing from residential care in particular, was becoming more prevalent and I was concerned that they could be at considerable risk, although they were usually located fairly quickly. I consequently, developed guidance and procedures to deal with this problem (See Appendix 20). This was the first guidance in Northern Ireland on this problem and is today a major risk factor in the sexual exploitation of children. Joint protocols between the Police and the Family and Child Care services have been developed in recent years to deal more effectively with this problem. This applied to children in the voluntary homes.
- 2.82 Following the Hughes Inquiry Report I was involved in implementing all of the recommendations accepted by the Boards and Police. I had a lead role on behalf of the four Boards in establishing a protocol for the joint investigation of the sexual abuse of children, as the Police were unable to accept recommendations 46 & 47 of the Hughes Inquiry, that Social Services should undertake a preliminary investigation of allegations of criminal misconduct before referral to the Police and that the DSS should have the discretion not to refer those "he deems to be patently false", as this was a decision for the Police to make. Given my experience of what happened in BWA, I agreed completely with the Police, and this had been our policy and practice prior to the Hughes Inquiry, as already evidenced in this statement. This applied to all children when sexual abuse was alleged.
- 2.83 I was also the four Boards' professional representative on the Regional Group which negotiated the agreement with NIPSA for the implementation of the strategy to professionalise the residential child care services.
- 2.84 There were difficulties with regard to the introduction of a complaints procedure for children in residential care and I was involved in the negotiations which subsequently resolved these difficulties. This included the procedures to be followed in relation to complaints against residential staff, including precautionary suspension, which has now been adopted by all statutory and voluntary agencies involved with children.

#### Statement of Truth

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

Signed R. Buntley Dated 11 / 11 / 14