

HIA REF: [            ]

NAME: [ Vincent O'Rourke ]

DATE: [            ]

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

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**Witness Statement of Vincent O'Rourke**

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I, Vincent O'Rourke, will say as follows: -

1. My route into social work involved a qualification in psychiatric nursing in 1972. I then obtained a Diploma in Hospital and Health Service Administration and worked in various roles over the next five years, including in a supervisory capacity within a residential setting for children with learning disabilities in the Dublin area. I obtained the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) in June 1980 (Jordanstown). My roles thereafter have been:-
  - July – October 1980. I was seconded by the Eastern Board to assist with the closure of Kincora Boys Hostel, employed by the East Belfast and Castlereagh District;
  - On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1980 I was appointed Senior Social Worker (SSW) in Residential Childcare and Day Care within Craigavon and Banbridge District. In this role I had management responsibility for the oversight of four statutory homes within this district. I was also responsible for chairing the reviews of children placed in residential care outside the district. I was in this role for approximately 8-9 years;
  - In or around 1989 I was appointed Assistant Principal Social Worker (APSW), still within the Craigavon and Banbridge district.

This placed management responsibility of fieldwork offices into my role. It was in this position that I was involved with [NL 164] in 1994-1995;

- After 1995 I spent approximately 8 years on the Adoption panel for the Southern Area, a period as Adoption agency decision maker for Craigavon and Banbridge and around 4-5 years as an Assistant Director before leaving the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in January 2008.

Since leaving social work I have focused on developing my career in psychotherapy and I have obtained my professional qualifications and I am working with Relate Northern Ireland. The roles I held between 1980 and 1995 brought me into contact with Nazareth, specifically in the context of attending the home for the purpose of chairing reviews, although I cannot recall how many children in total may have been placed by the Craigavon and Banbridge area during this period.

2. I have a limited recollection of Nazareth due to the infrequent number of occasions that I visited the home. Even when I was chairing reviews, these were mostly on a 6-monthly basis. What I do recall is that upon arrival an elderly nun would have shown me to a room after answering the door. I also remember that there was a long corridor, however I didn't have to go very far along this corridor before I was taken into a room. The person I would have seen most over the years, and have the best recollection of, was [SR 148]. I believe for most of the time she was the [redacted]. Other than knowing the Head of the House I had no knowledge of Nazareth, for example their structures or how the home ran on a daily basis.
3. The physicality of Nazareth was different to any of the statutory homes I dealt with. Nazareth appeared to be large red brick building, which from the outside gave an appearance of being an institution. However I didn't get a sense of what was happening inside being a regime of institutional care, for example I was aware that the children would have

been involved in activities outside the home. I also had no feeling or impression of any attitudes from the Sisters that were indicative of a strict regime rather my sense was one of kindness and gentleness. Further I had observed in review meetings that they had an understanding of emotional and developmental needs of the children

4. I am aware that the inquiry has received evidence in relation to the experiences of **NL 164** with Nazareth lodge and I have reviewed documentation detailing my involvement at that time.
5. At the time when the complaints were being looked into with regard to **NL 164**, the organisation was known as the Craigavon and Banbridge Community Health and Social Services Trust. My recollection of the management structure therefore was that fieldwork responsibility would have been held by **NHB 137**, under the supervision of Ann Hamill SSW, for whom I had line management responsibility.
6. My general recollections of **NL 164** and Nazareth were that there were issues in the relationship between **NL 164** and **SR 18**. It was not always an easy placement. Sometimes there were difficulties, other times it seemed better, but that is a sense I have rather than a recollection of specific details. Prior to being shown records I had no independent recollection of the complaints now brought to my attention.
7. The first matter that was drawn to my attention was a complaint by **NL 164** that **SR 18** had poked him. This was brought to my attention by Ann Hamill, SSW on 13 May 1994. I note from the record at SNB 49589 that she had already agreed that this complaint would be investigated in line with agreed procedures. I cannot currently recall the precise procedures that would have applied in 1994, however I am reassured that reference is made to procedure in the record. This matter was not referred back to me in writing and I note on 24 May 1994 **NL 164** advised his social worker that he did not wish to progress

a complaint. I think it likely that this conclusion would have been brought to my attention by Ms Hamill during professional supervision. While notes would have been taken of those discussions, in 1994 they were regarded as confidential and did not get placed on the child's fieldwork file. Practice later changed both in respect of the manner of supervision, and the records kept of same which would have been placed on the child's file, which in part reflects a transition to a more open record and accountability.

8. The most significant period of my involvement is September 1994 to March 1995. I note that during that period **NHB 137** brought issues directly to my attention. I also note Ms Hamill's non-attendance at two reviews during this period. My recollection of Ms Hamill is that she had been on sick leave for periods of time, and whilst I cannot remember exact dates of same, I think it likely that her absence from work is why **NHB 137** directly involved me by letter on 16 September 1994, which is at SNB 49431.
9. Prior to being shown the letter I had no actual memory of the detail of it. It was clearly bringing to my attention concerns that the social worker held and I believe that he likely discussed those with me so that I had an awareness of the issues before receiving the written correspondence. I also note from the records that a review was held (chaired by me) on 21 September 1994 (at SNB 49632). While I have no memory of whether I had had sight of the letter dated 16 September 1994 before that review, I have a strong belief I would have at least had knowledge of the issues which were raised in the letter on the basis of my expectation that **NHB 137** likely spoke to me first. No discussion, however, of the complaints was recorded. I would surmise this was due to the fact they were still being looked into and no outcome had been reached.
10. I do note however that within the review I am recorded as asking **NL 164** whether he felt he was being treated unfairly within the unit. In

September 1994 I recollect that children were only beginning to become involved in reviews (or part thereof) and their attendance was a relatively new practice. I also recall that, on occasions, the young person was seen only by the Chair (myself and the social worker). The record of this review does not record for how long, or with who **NL 164** was present and I cannot now remember. I would have considered it appropriate in 1994 to ask such a question of the young person, however practice has significantly developed since.

11. My first written response to **NHB 137** letter of 16 September 1994 is by memo dated 27 September 1994 (at SNB 49622). Having considered the matters raised in the letter I know I would have regarded the issues as needing to be looked into, while not necessarily forming a view as to the severity of same pending additional information. I think it likely that before writing the memo of 27 September 1994 that there were discussions with **NHB 137** and my written record was a summary. Looking at it now, I recognise that it should have been more detailed and explicit.
12. There were two matters being drawn to my attention: a complaint by a child against a staff member, something which I regarded as always needing to be looked into; and an allegation of information being withheld from a fieldwork social worker by a member of staff.
13. In relation to this second matter I am clear that my practice, having had experience in previous residential units, would not have tolerated any residential staff member withholding information from a responsible social worker in the fieldwork office. Looking at my memo of 27 September 1994 I note my comment with regard to whether **SR 18** **SR 18** was aware of **NL 170** behaviour. I expect it was my intention in relation to this to note my concern about whether **SR 18** **SR 18** was aware of the behaviour of **NL 170** in terms of withholding information from the social worker, as that would not have been acceptable.

14. I also note that I requested a number of steps be taken. I then requested feedback and the expectation would have been to receive this in writing from the fieldwork office. I do however note that I did not impose or suggest a timeframe (which would not have been practice in 1994 to the best of my recollection but as practice improved a clear timeframe would have been given for a response to be provided).
15. On reviewing records I find no written outcome or follow-up. I would be surprised if the steps I directed in September 1994 were not followed, and I would further be surprised if an outcome was not achieved. It is possible that the matters raised were settled and/or resolved through time and discussion. I note, for example, the report of improved relations between NL 164 and SR 18 during the review of 13 March 1995. However, if that had occurred I would still have expected a written record for the file. No reference is contained to the complaints within the record of this review. I have no actual memory of the meeting and cannot comment further.
16. In respect of the review on 13 March 1995 I note that was also attended by Barbara McDermott, Assistant Principal Social Worker. I recollect that she took over some of my duties as Assistant Principal when I was allocated to chair the Adoption Panel. As both Ms McDermott and myself were present at this meeting I believe this reflects that at this stage Barbara McDermott was in an induction role or handover role. I also understand that she is involved in later issues and complaints by NL 164
17. In relation to my actions regarding the matters drawn to my attention in September 1994 I gave guidance to the social worker as to the next steps that should be taken in relation to same. I would have expected them to be followed. I do not have any recollection of referring them to anyone else, specifically my line manager, and I note no documentation is available that suggests I did so. I would have awaited the information

from the further enquiries requested before assessing the severity of same and thus the necessity of onward referral. It would not have been practice to refer each and every complaint up the management chain, rather each individual complaint would have been considered at the appropriate management level. On a review of available documentation there is no indication that the further information and up-date I requested was provided to me to allow this to be considered further.

18. [Looking at the issues now, I would certainly describe any withholding of information from a fieldwork social worker as inappropriate professional practice, but I am unable to say whether this had occurred on a single occasion or whether it was a more regular practice. Had I received the requested up-date the judgment as to what further steps were required, if any, could more readily have been made.
19. My main concern in receiving this information would also have been to ensure that there were no matters affecting the welfare of the child for which Craigavon and Banbridge Trust was responsible. Any wider implications would have been for the consideration of management above me, had they been informed. It also would have been for them to consider whether notification of the complaint needed to be made outside the Trust.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

Vincent O'Leary

Dated

9<sup>th</sup> April 2015



File



Our Ref: KMcS\AM

Your Ref:

16th September 1994

## PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Vincent O'Rourke, APSW  
Child and Family Care Unit  
2 Old Lurgan Road  
Portadown

Dear Vincent

RE: [NL 164] - Presently placed in Nazareth Lodge, Belfast

I have received reports from Nazareth outlining incidents in regard to [NL 164]. I enclose copies of these. These incidents I was informed were the substance of complaints made against [NL 164] by other residents.

On contacting the Unit on 13th September 1994 by telephone I was informed by the Residential Social Worker [NL 170] that [NL 164] wished to make complaints against [SR 18] and also against [NL 165] and another resident [redacted].

The incident in regard to [SR 18] involved her allegedly locking [NL 164] in the kitchen.

[NL 170], Residential Social Worker also stated it was alleged by [NL 164] that [NL 165] had beaten him up while on holiday and that [SR 18] was aware of this and nothing was done.

The Residential Social Worker [NL 170] involved in making this report also stated she wished to speak to me in private in regard to her concerns in relation to [NL 164]. She also stated that she was advised not to share the information in regard to the issues [NL 164] was raising re: the kitchen and [NL 165]'s incident with Social Services.

I subsequently spoke to both [NL 170] and [NL 164] on 14th September 1994 in Nazareth Lodge in regard to the incidents. [NL 170] stated she did not wish to disclose any information to myself. [NL 164] was interviewed and stated he had no complaints to make even though the issues of the kitchen and [NL 165] were raised with him.

I find it concerning that the complaints against [NL 164] appear to be those which can be dealt with within the Unit and by the appropriate Social Workers involved, and that the complaints



and enquired what would happen if a return home proved unsuccessful. Mr O'Rourke assured Mr McLoughlin that the date set for 'NL 164's return home can be negotiated and that Mrs [REDACTED]'s circumstances would be taken into considered prior to NL 164's discharge.

#### HEALTH

NL 164 enjoys good health; has a healthy appetite and sleeps well, although would read until very late at night.

His heart murmur appears to have healed.

#### HOBBIES

NL 164 has started ice skating and enjoys this.

#### SCHOOL

NL 164 has commenced [REDACTED]'s and it was pointed out to NL 164 that it was up to him to establish himself in this school, get a good report in order that he will then be in a position to apply for a place at a Grammar School.

#### COMPLAINTS

There have been a number of complaints received about incidents which occurred within the Unit between NL 164 and staff/residents. Mr O'Rourke asked NL 164 if he felt he was being unfairly treated within the Unit and NL 164 said no. Mr NHB 137 said that the complaints procedure was being abused by residents and SR 18 said that the majority of complaints received are dealt with by Nazareth.

#### AREAS OF WORK

1. Goal set for NL 164 to return to his mother's care in Easter 1995.
2. Access to be increased accordingly.
3. NHB 137 / NL 172, Social Worker to address with NL 164 his behaviour ie temper and selfishness.

NEXT REVIEW: Monday 13th March 1995 at 10.30 am in Nazareth.