

Survivor Full Name: **Mark William Johnston** Other Known Name: **None**
DOB: **20/06/1982** Redress Case Ref Num: **APP012875** Status: **Low Priority**
Mother's Name: **Janice Johnston (maiden name Young)** Father's Name: **Thomas Johnston**
Siblings Names/DOB: **Kevin Johnston - DOB 02/02/1978 approx, Claire Johnston DOB - 01/051981 (both in foster care)** Serious Criminal Conviction in the last 5 years: **None**
Reason for being placed in care: **Unruly behaviour**

1. Introduction

My name is Mark Johnston and I am making this statement to share my experiences of being in care as a child and the impact these experiences have had on my life. Some of the details are difficult for me to talk about, and some memories are clearer than others, but I will describe what I remember to the best of my ability.

I understand that my records from the time are limited or incomplete, and I want to explain my experiences in my own words.

2. My Time in Care – Overview

I was involved with social work services in the Kirkaldy, Fife area. I believe this involvement began when I was around 8 years old. My older brother and I had a close relationship but then he was put into care, and I missed him a lot.

This really unsettled me and I started to play up after that; there were some behavioural issues at home then I believe a Social Services children's panel decided I'd have to go into care also. I recall assessments being done, but I did not always understand what they were for.

Over the following years, I was moved between two care settings. These included:

- **Ovenstone Residential School, Pittenweem, Fife – from 8-11 years of age approx.**
- **Melville House Residential School, Cupar, Fife – from 12-16 years of age approx.**

I will describe each placement as I remember it.

Ovenstone Residential School, Pittenweem

I believe I was placed here around 1990. I was only eight years old then and I remained there until around the age of 11/12 years old. I was in a dorm with around 8 other boys and our room was by the showering area. We had communal showers here and as a young boy it wasn't very nice having to go naked in front of others and it made me feel really anxious and uncomfortable. Staff would be there watching as well.

When I was about ten, I was physically abused by the headmaster. He would take me into a room, close the wooden shutters so no one could see, and punch me on the side and back of my head with his fist. I believe he did this deliberately to avoid leaving visible marks.

I never reported any of the abuse as I was often intimidated, particularly by the headmaster, Alexander Cameron, and I frequently ran away because of the stress and fear I felt. I was only a small boy of around 3 and a half foot when I was punched by that grown man.

On one occasion, after I spilled hot tea, another staff member touched my genitals. I do not know if he used the incident as an excuse as he was one of the nicer staff members, but it left me deeply unsettled. I think he was probably trying to wipe the hot tea off me as he'd never been nasty like some of the other staff. I remember he was the tallest of all the staff there.

Restraint was common and extremely forceful. Staff would sit on top of me for hours, leaving me exhausted. I recall a female staff member, a heavier woman, sitting on me for hours as a form of restraint. A lot of the time they'd restrain me because I'd kick off in retaliation to being physically assaulted by other residents there. They'd get you in a headlock or just hit you.

Abuse came from both male and female staff, though there were some who were kind and caring. One female staff member called Sheila was a Godsend, as she would help me if I was upset and kicking off to avoid others having to restrain me. She knew how rough they could be with the kids there and knew how to talk to me to get me to calm down.

I wet the bed most nights until I was around 16. As punishment, I was made to sleep in the soaking wet sheets until morning. This made me upset and embarrassed as other kids would make fun of me; it made me a target for abuse and the staff knew that.

The minibus driver, I think he was called David Sutherland, would give me drags of his cigarettes, and I'd never smoked at this stage. I remember being at his house some weekends and staying overnight as I wet the bed there too. It's crazy to think I was even allowed to stay there with him. I don't recall much of what happened there, but when I think about it, he may have been trying to groom me.

Staff would sometimes tell me cruel things, such as that I would never get out of the home, and they'd call me names like 'ya wee bastard'. These words were emotionally abusive and left me feeling hopeless.

Melville House Residential School

After leaving Ovenstone, I attended Melville House on an order as a day pupil, not residential. I was sent to Melville House around 1993/1994 when I was approximately 11/12 years old and left when I was 16 in 1998.

Even there, I suffered abuse. At the entrance to the building there was a four-foot drop to the side, and a staff member Mr Moonie pushed me off it; I landed on my back, and I had cuts and a bloodied side. There was no medical treatment given to me. There were more forceful restraints where my arm would be held up my back by staff, and I'd think it was broken it was that painful.

3. Emotional and Long-Term Impact

My experiences in care have affected me throughout my life. The care system failed me completely. Between the ages of eight and sixteen, I endured experiences that shaped my childhood in the worst possible way. I carried on smoking after first experiencing it when in Ovenstone school, and I only recently gave up. Unfortunately, I have to use inhalers now to help with my breathing and I'm due to have some tests to see if I have COPD.

When I left care, I was given no support and was placed into homeless accommodation for years. Within around 4-6 months of leaving care I had turned to hard drugs to numb the pain and trauma, using them as a coping mechanism. I felt I was set up to fail in life.

I have now been free from drugs, including methadone, for fifteen years. However, I continue to suffer from anxiety because of the trauma. Depression, anti-depressants. Even speaking about these experiences today leaves me feeling stressed. I can't function always function properly. These experiences have shaped my life in ways that continue to affect me today.

4. Missing or Incomplete Records

I understand that some of the institutions involved have been unable to provide full records of my time in care. This has been difficult, but I know that my memories and experiences are valid. I am sharing what I remember because these events had a significant impact on my life.

5. Closing Statement

I am making this statement to help Redress Scotland understand what happened to me and how it has affected me. I am doing this in the hope that my experiences will be acknowledged and that I can continue to move forward in my life.

Thank you for taking the time to read my statement.

Signed: *Mark Johnston*

Date: 17/08/2026