

Statement Addendum

Client Name: Shona Halliday
Date of Birth: 06/11/1975
Care Setting: Howden Hall in Edinburgh
Dates: 1989
Persons Involved: Children and Staff

Full Statement

In around 1989, when I was 14 years old, I was taken away from my family home and placed into the care of Midlothian, Scotland. I was sent to Howden Hall in Edinburgh. This period of my life became the worst and most traumatic time I have ever experienced, and the memories of it still affect me deeply even now.

From the moment I arrived at Howden Hall, I felt unsafe. I was a young teenager who had been removed from my home, frightened and confused, and no one explained properly what was happening or what my life would look like there. Instead of feeling supported, I felt immediately exposed and vulnerable. The staff often spoke to us in horrible and degrading ways. Their tone and behaviour made it clear that we were not treated as children who needed care, but as problems to be controlled.

Very quickly I realised that I did not feel safe living there. The atmosphere in the home was hostile and frightening. Other children were allowed to bully, threaten and physically attack me, and the staff did nothing to stop it. I was often targeted by other residents. They would pick on me, hit me, and threaten me. I lived in constant fear of them. Instead of protecting me, the staff ignored what was happening or acted as if it was normal.

Because I felt so unsafe, I ran away from the home several times. I was desperate to escape. On one occasion I was found by the police when I was very drunk at a young age and brought back to the home. When I returned, instead of being treated with care or concern, I was humiliated in a way that still haunts me today. A male and female member of staff stripped me naked, forced me into a shower, and then dragged me to bed. I was completely humiliated, embarrassed, and deeply upset. I was only a child, and the way they handled the situation was degrading and traumatic. I remember feeling completely powerless and ashamed, and it is something that still affects me emotionally when I think about it.

Although food was always technically provided, it was often food we did not want or could not eat. As a result, many of us would still go hungry. Punishments were common and often unfair. Pocket money was regularly taken away from us, sometimes for very small things or for reasons that were never properly explained.

My biggest fear at Howden Hall was the other children. They were often aggressive and unpredictable. I remember lying in bed at night in what was supposed to be my safe place, but even there I was threatened. One girl told me she was going to come into my room and beat me up during the night. I was terrified. I did not feel safe anywhere in that building.

One night when these threats were being made, I became so frightened that I had a panic attack. I ran into the kitchen and took a knife because I felt I had no other way to protect myself. I planned to keep it beside my bed the next night in case someone attacked me. The fact that a 14-year-old child felt she needed a weapon just to sleep shows how unsafe I felt. The staff knew about this situation, yet instead of speaking to me or trying to understand why I was so frightened, they simply sat outside my bedroom all night. They never once came in to ask if I was okay, what had happened, or how I was feeling. I felt completely ignored and abandoned.

The other children would often deliberately wind me up and torment me to try to provoke a reaction. The staff saw this happening and still did nothing to stop it. It was mentally exhausting and incredibly distressing. One incident that frightened me badly was when one of the residents set her room on fire. My room was next door. I remember the fear and panic that night. The environment in the home felt chaotic and dangerous. Many of the children behaved in ways that seemed completely out of control, and there was little real supervision or protection.

Family visits were supposed to happen on weekends, but I was often not allowed them. I remember one weekend when I stayed at a friend's house. It felt like the only moment of freedom I had experienced. However, I was forced to return to the home on the very first night. No one properly explained why, and I felt again like I had no control over my life. It left me feeling embarrassed, rejected and unwanted. I only stayed in Howden Hall for a few months, but those months left lasting scars. Eventually I returned home, but the damage had already been done.