

Statement Addendum

Client Name: Donna Paton
Date of Birth: 09/09/1975
Care Setting: residential school – Perth fornethy house
Dates: 1984-1994
Persons Involved: Staff

Full Statement

I was around 9 years old when I was diagnosed with ADHD. At the time, I was attending Blackfriars School in Glasgow, and I had no idea that my life was about to change in a way that would stay with me forever. The school told me and four other girls that we were going on a holiday over the school break. I remember how excited we all were. We believed them. We packed our things thinking it was going to be something fun. I can still picture us sitting on the bus, laughing and smiling, talking about what it would be like. We felt lucky. We felt special.

When we arrived at Perth Fornethy House Residential School, we ran off the bus full of excitement. We rushed to our rooms and saw our names written on the beds. I remember feeling happy in that moment. I thought this was going to be an adventure.

But everything changed the second the teachers from Blackfriars School left.

As soon as they walked out, the staff at Perth Fornethy House started screaming at us. They dragged us down into the sitting room. I remember my mood shifting instantly. The excitement disappeared and was replaced with fear. My stomach dropped. I didn't understand what was happening.

They shouted at us, asking if we thought this was a holiday. They screamed that we were not allowed to laugh. We were shocked and confused because we had been told it was a holiday. Panic set in immediately. We were only children. We didn't know where we were or why we were there.

Every time we tried to speak to the staff to ask what was going on, they would laugh at us, ignore us, and walk away. That made it worse. It made me feel small and powerless. We had no control.

The abuse started right away and became part of daily life.

The staff would push and prod us in the corridors. We weren't allowed to speak up or defend ourselves. They called us names. They screamed at us constantly, often for no reason at all. I started to feel lost inside myself. I didn't understand what I had done wrong. My emotions became overwhelming, and I struggled to regulate them. That is when my anxiety began. I was always on edge, always waiting for someone to shout, grab, or humiliate me.

I witnessed staff physically beating the older children. I saw them being abused repeatedly. I was terrified that I would be next. Watching it happen to others was traumatising. I felt helpless and deeply distressed seeing other children being hurt.

There are many staff members whose faces I still remember clearly. But I will never forget the head at the

time, Mrs Fletcher. She was in charge. She must have known what was happening. From my perspective, she turned a blind eye to the abuse.

One of the most humiliating parts of my time there was how they treated me because I was a bed wetter. Instead of helping me, they punished me. The staff would come into my room, make a huge scene, and drag me to a cold bath. They scrubbed my body as punishment. They always had to wash me in the bath when I wet the bed. It was degrading and traumatic. I felt exposed and ashamed.

They would hang my wet sheets up at my door or at the window so that other children walking past could see that I had wet the bed. They singled me out and laughed at me in front of the other children. I was humiliated daily. I felt terrorised. I felt worthless.

Food was another form of control and punishment. We didn't like the food, but we were forced to eat it. If we refused, we were made to sit at the table for hours. Sometimes we were left there until the food was gone. If we still refused, they would restrain us and force feed us with such force that it caused physical pain. Being restrained like that as a child was frightening and violent. I felt completely powerless in those moments.

We were never given privacy. If we had a phone call or wrote a letter home, staff would stand over us, assisting and reading everything. There was no way to ask for help safely. I was too scared to say anything. I knew if I spoke up, there would be consequences.

They didn't allow me to go on weekend visits. I remember one of my friend's mum had finally had enough and came to get her. I watched her leave. I wanted to cry out for help. I wanted to beg to go home. But I was frozen in fear. I was too scared to speak.

Sometimes we were punished by being made to stand alone in the dark, cold hall all night. Alone. As a 9-year-old child. The fear I felt in those moments is something I still struggle to describe. It was overwhelming and consuming.

We were shells of ourselves in that place. All the children were scared. We were beaten, bullied, shouted at, restrained, humiliated. There was no comfort. No safety. No kindness.

I was there for around six weeks. But those six weeks have stayed with me for a lifetime.

At the time, I became anxious, withdrawn, and emotionally overwhelmed. I felt confused and constantly frightened. I struggled to understand why this was happening to me. I had been told it was a holiday.

Instead, I experienced abuse.

As I grew older, the impact became clearer. I have struggled with anxiety and depression for most of my life because of what happened there. I suffer from PTSD. I have sleepless nights. I experience flashbacks. I relive the screaming, the cold baths, the humiliation, the force feeding, the dark hallways. Certain sounds, smells, or situations trigger intense emotional responses.

I struggle with trust. I struggle with feeling safe. I often feel like I am still that 9-year-old child who doesn't understand why she was treated that way. I carry confusion and pain. I still ask myself: What happened?

Why did it happen to me? Why was I not protected?

I feel that I was failed. Failed by the adults who were meant to protect me. Failed by the system. Failed by those who knew and did nothing.

What happened at Blackfriars School in Glasgow and at Perth Fornethy House Residential School has had a lifelong impact on my mental health. The abuse did not end when I left. It lives on inside me through anxiety, depression, PTSD, and sleepless nights.

I was only a child. And I deserved to be safe.