

Survivor Full Name: **Karen May Urquhart** Other Known Name: **None**  
DOB: **07/04/1969** Redress Case Ref Num: **TBC – Initial Submission** Status: **Low Priority**  
Mother's Name: **Marion Urquhart (Cook maiden name)** Father's Name: **Malcolm Urquhart**  
Siblings Names/DOB: **None** Serious Criminal Conviction in the last 5 years: **None**  
Reason for being placed in care: **Truancy**

## **1. Introduction**

My name is Karen Urquhart, 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**

My mum had suffered a brain haemorrhage when I was around 6/7 years old, and my dad had to give up work to look after us both. My mum was totally dependent on me and my dad. Life had completely changed and it was turned upside down. This impacted on my father; he was fine, but my dad was a quiet man who struggled with the caring responsibilities.

I struggled to cope in high school, so I would stop going, and this is what led to a children's panel meeting being held with Edinburgh social work services. I believe the children's panel may have convinced my dad it would be better for us both if I went into care. I was 13 years old at this time.

I was initially placed into Calder Grove Residential Care Home, Edinburgh around 1982, where I stayed for 6 months before moving on to Niddrie Marishcal Children's Home in Edinburgh around 1982/83, where I also stayed for 6 months. I will describe each placement as I remember it.

### **Calder Grove**

I never got to see my parents throughout the entire time in Calder Grove. I was allowed phone calls home, but it was difficult to speak to my father as he never had a phone. Everything had to be planned and arranged through my aunt just so I could speak to him.

If I wanted to go outside, they wouldn't let me. The staff would use excessive force to restrain me, which involved two members of staff at a time. It would be a mix of male and female staff who did this, and I can remember one of the females was called Avril. They would slap me round the back of the head every now and again for fun, and the way they spoke to me was awful. They would often mock me and call me derogatory names and say I was a baby, telling me to shut up. I would see staff hitting the other children in there, and this was quite a regular occurrence.

When I went to get washed, the showers were communal and we all had to shower together, leaving me with no privacy whatsoever. There were even male staff who would stand there watching us as we were all naked. The male staff would often make me uncomfortable by making lewd comments about my body and the size of my breasts. I was quite well developed for my age. I was scared at the time and embarrassed. I still cover myself up to this day as a result; I'm very conscious of that.

At mealtimes, we had to eat what was put in front of us or we wouldn't be allowed any recreational time and would be left to go hungry. It didn't matter whether we liked it or not. The food wasn't nice at all.

I was provided with a tampon once during my menstrual cycle, and I remember looking at it confused while the staff laughed. I'd never used one before and nobody showed me how to use it; I ended up inserting the cardboard applicator as well, which left me in pain and unable to walk properly. I remember the staff laughing and telling me I should have removed the cardboard, but nobody told me. I was laughed at rather than given any compassion, and this affected my confidence and self-esteem. I couldn't use tampons again until I was in my 40's.

There was a quiet room where I would be locked in isolation, and I would be left in there for hours at a time. I would be put in there if I had 'misbehaved' at school, not turning up on time for example, or when I ran away. I was put in there after being returned from running away, and there were times I wasn't given any dinner and was left to go hungry.

There were boys there aged 15/16 and we weren't separated, so there were a lot of sexual innuendos which made me feel very uncomfortable and unsafe at times. We shared a dorm with around 2 other girls. There was a culture of bullying among the other children in the home. The staff were well aware of everything that was going on, but they never did anything to stop it. I would even say that some staff encouraged it and found it amusing.

When you were 14 you were allowed to smoke in Calder Grove. I can remember having my mouth washed out with soap by staff there which I think was because I was caught with a cigarette when I was only 13. Smoking was a way of coping at that time. The staff would give you cigarettes. I still smoke now but have COPD and had part of my lung removed because of smoke damage. I struggle with my mobility now and can't do anything strenuous, or work, so I'm on disability benefit.

### **Niddrie Marishcal**

I then moved on to Niddrie Marishcal, and in there the staff were physical with me and would grab me, push me, and pull me around. At mealtimes, I would be made to eat things until I was physically sick to make me eat all my food.

There was a lot of bullying going on in there as well. The staff knew it was happening, but they would just turn a blind eye to it all. There were boys in there who were sexually inappropriate towards me. They would grope me and make comments about my body, which I reported to staff but again nothing was ever really done about it.

There was a graveyard out the back of Niddrie, and the staff used to make up horror stories, which put the fear of God into me. There was one bedroom that didn't face the graveyard, and I begged to be moved, but I think they just enjoyed scaring me. I was terrified every night that my room was haunted.

I had no visits from my parents when I was here either, which was very hard.

### **3. Emotional and Long-Term Impact**

I never had any leave or visits with my family throughout my time in care there, which made things even harder and more isolating for me. I missed them very much.

My experiences in care have been a contributing factor to the struggles I have had with my mental health throughout my life. They have affected the relationships I have had with others due to a lack of trust, and I still have nightmares and flashbacks about my time there.

I have my children and my grandchildren and they're my life now. I prefer to be inside and don't socialise unless I'm with my family.

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:** *Karen Urquhart*

**Date:** 19/08/2026