

Survivor Supplementary Statement

Date completed: 13/07/2026

Survivor Full Name: **Robert Johnstone** Other Known Name: **None** DOB: **03/03/1962**

Redress Case Ref Num: **First submission** Status: **Low Priority**

Mother's Name: **Irene Johnstone / maiden name - Brown**

Father's Name: **Robert Johnstone**

Siblings Names/DOB: **Archie Johnstone DOB 28/03/1964. Archie was also in care.**

Ellizabeth DOB not known - not in care. Anne DBO not known - not in care.

Serious Criminal Conviction in the last 5 years: **None**

Placed in care aged approx. 13/14 years due to truancy

1. Introduction

My name is Robert Johnstone. 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 Barrhead Social Services. I recall assessments being done, but I did not always understand what they were for.

Over the following months/years, I was moved between several care settings. These included:

- Thornly Park in Paisley/Barrhead residential Institution for approx 2 years aged 13/14 years
- Longriggend Remand Centre for 3 months at 15 years old
- Wellington Farm Residential School near Penicuik aged 15 for approx. 2 months

I will describe each placement as I remember it.

Thornly Park

I believe I was placed here for the first time around 1975/76 aged 13 or 14. It was a residential institution, and I stayed there for approx 2 years.

There was a big house in Thornly Park where the staff stayed. I'd have to go right up to the top of a big 3 runner ladder at 14 to paint it. Having a 14-year-old painting that. They knew what could happen. You shouldn't have a young person like that doing it. I worked in the gardens here too; I had to cut the gardens and everything.

Longriggend Remand Centre – for 3 months at 15 years old

I remember one of the first days I was in here I saw a boy slit his own wrists in front of me; it was horrific. We were locked up for 23 hrs a day. It was around 4.30pm on a Saturday night when they were locking up until the next morning. This boy was in the cell and said to me "I'm going to turn my wrists" so I told him not to be so stupid; he was adamant and broke off a bit of formica from a table and stuck it in his wrist, so I pressed the button for help. I was left in the cell on my own all night; I was traumatised. I was totally gobsmacked. I had never seen anything like that in my life.

There was another instance with a pish pot. I was in B Hall, and I came out in the morning to empty my pot as we didn't have a proper toilet in the cells. I was walking along and there were these 2 screws. I smiled at my mate and was going to ask him for a fag. The screw stopped me and said, "who are you smiling at?" I said, "I was just smiling at my mate sir" and that's when he smacked me right in the face. I remember the pish pot going all over me as I was holding it at the time, then they forced me to get on my hands and knees and clean it all up. They threw me into solitary for that for 2 days. I was 15. Through the day it was freezing and I was only given a pair of pyjama trousers, no top. The dinner they gave me in there was freezing.

You got punished in there all the time. Every day there's a punishment in there. You're like 14, 15 years old and you're locked up in a cell for twenty-three hours a day. That's not right. You're only a young boy and you don't understand. I didn't know what was happening from day to day. They were prison officers; it was like the army. You'd be locked up for 23 hrs a day and had half an hour of exercise. If it rained, you'd get nothing.

They called me a scumbag, cunt, prick, rat. We were young boys and couldn't understand why they were so angry. If you looked at them and your eyes were dilated, you were going to get leathered. They brought me down a lot and constantly humiliated and degraded me. I saw a lot of boys breaking. It broke my heart. It was like a boot camp. That lad that did what he did when I saw him, well, there was a lot more boys doing that in that place. There was a lot, a lot of people done it. That was all you'd hear. You'd hear people say, "there's another one, and another one." It was always on a Saturday night.

Their punishment was the digger. If you were talking when you were walking or not calling them sir, you'd be sent to the digger, for anything like that. I was in reception when I first went in and a prison officer asked me where I stayed and I told him "Lee Avenue" then he said to me "tell that officer where you stayed son" so I told him then he smacked me in the jaw. It was awful. They were just animals. They would just slap me on the face and mouth; I was totally bullied. I saw other boys get beat up by the screws as well. The place was terrible.

When I was in solitary, I got a pair of pyjamas bottoms through the day, no bed. There was a mattress on the floor but no covers; just your pyjama trousers and no top. You'd be sitting in there freezing with a light on. It would all be taken away during the day and you were left with nothing; no food, no water, no blanket. I was treated worse than an animal. No pillow, nothing. I only ever got a blanket at nighttime; I would be in here for 48 hours at time. I wouldn't even treat an animal like this, honestly. It was torture. You wouldn't get a shower. You'd get to wash your face then they'd send you back. There was a guy called Barry or something; he was a nasty one.

We were so underfed. We got a fish with the eyes on and 6 or 7 chips and 6 or 7 peas. It was minging. You wouldn't eat it. They used to give you one slice of ham between 2 slices of bread. I saw a hunger strike go on there and it was all down to the fish. They built barricades in there with tables and chairs and when they came in with riot gear on, they pulled everyone out and hit them with batons. We were starving essentially. We were always starving; the food was disgusting. I lost a lot of weight whilst in there. The food was stinking. It's no diet for a young person. No diet for anyone. Eggs would be all black inside as they were so overboiled.

All through pre-school the only thing I learnt was how to work. I was treated like a slave doing hard labour. The schooling in the place was scandalous. Have you ever heard of Hogan's Heels? We got made to watch cricket every day in a classroom for half an hour, and that was your schooling. I was never in a class in my life. Never. I've lost a lot of education in my placements. Every placement I lost education. I was only in there as a slave.

They would make us use a pish pot in our cell and we had to go and slop out every morning at 6am before breakfast. It was degrading. I won't lie to you; I was the lowest I have ever been in here. I honestly wanted to and considered taking my own life. It was that bad, that's how genuinely lonely I felt. I wanted to kill myself in here.

After Longriggend I was sent back to Thornly Park. I'm not sure how long there for before going to Wellington Farm but I don't think it was for long.

Wellington Farm Residential School near Penicuik aged 15 for a couple of months

Wellington farm was horrific I was abused there too. I never got an education there. I was forced into slave labour, carrying heavy concrete and painting every single day. It was like a full-time job; they beat me too.

I started in the painters then ended up in the brickies, in the builders' yard. There was a cement mixer, and there was me, a guy called Mulligan and I think Deegan, and there was an Irish lad, Paddy, we called him. We used to mix concrete there and barrow it for about half a mile down the road and across fields for months, and months, and months. It was slave labour. They'd make you work, work, work and I never got one bit of schooling.

The shower block was open, so you had no privacy when showering. The staff would watch you all the time. There was one guy there, Forsyth, I never liked him because of the way he would look at you. He would look at you funny when showering. We were convinced he was a paedophile because of how he would look at you.

We had to strip our beds each day and take off the mattress, which was only a thin one. We had to make a 'bed block' which was all the bed sheets, your clothes etc all bundled neatly together in a certain way. If they weren't happy with how you did it, they would throw it all on the floor and make you do it again. We weren't used to all that as young boys; our mothers did our beds. I once had to sleep on the bed without a mattress as a punishment.

You were allowed to smoke and buy tobacco inside here. I was only 15 but you were allowed to smoke, and I'd never touched a cigarette until I went in there. I still smoke to this day; still smoke tobacco. If you needed a fag but there was no tobacco left, some of the staff would sometimes give you fags.

3. Emotional and Long-Term Impact

My experiences in care have affected me throughout my life.

Care was a bad time for me. When I came out of Wellington, I started with psoriasis. I'd never had it in my life and put it down to the worry. I was stressed and suffer with anxiety now, it's hard to talk about.

I can't understand why I was treated so badly. I turned to alcohol when I was young because of what happened to me. I turned to alcohol for a while to help me deal with stuff but thankfully I realised it won't take my problems away and I stopped. I don't drink anymore; I just used it to help me cope at the time.

When I was 16 or 17, I used to take medication off my doctor for sleeping but don't take anything now. I was only young and I became addicted to them. I work all the time now to keep myself busy and keep my mind active. I don't like the past; the past is bad to me.

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: Robert Johnstone

Date: 13/07/2026