

Traumatised care home girl 'suffocated herself'

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A GIRL was so traumatised by her treatment at the hands of nuns at her care home she suffocated herself to the point of collapse, an inquiry has heard.

The child, whose age was not given, often 'took fits' after cutting off her air supply with her clothing, the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry was told yesterday.

Giving evidence in Edinburgh, Carol McBay recalled witnessing the behaviour while a social worker in the early 1980s at Southannan School, in Fairlie, Ayrshire, which was run by the Quarriers charity. She told the inquiry the girl was transferred to her care from a Catholic-run children's home in Glasgow, where the child said nuns had beaten her with wooden spoons.

Mrs McBay waived her right to anonymity to give evidence at phase three of the inquiry, which aims to investigate historic child abuse at residential care homes.

She told the hearing: 'She was just a lovely wee girl. When I used to say, "Let's go and do the supper together", she had a way of cutting the oxygen off from her brain by pulling her clothes right up so it would cut the windpipe off. I'd say, "Why are you doing that?", and she'd say, "I don't want kitchen".

'I'd ask why and every time there was a wooden spoon she used to say that's what she got hit with. I told her, "It won't happen here", and she'd relax, but she still had that thing where she would cut her oxygen off and she collapsed one day when she was out with me in public.'

Questioned by inquiry junior counsel Jane Rattray, Mrs McBay said the home had procedures in place for abuse to be reported. But a second witness, Johanna Brady, described the system at the charity's main care facility at Quarriers Village near Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire, as 'inappropriate'.

The former social worker and depute house mother, who also waived her right to anonymity, told how a teenage girl reported being 'touched' by a staff member in 1973 or 1974. But after an investigation in which the child was not interviewed, Mrs Brady said the girl was branded a 'fantasist'.

She added: 'Even all those years ago I felt it was inappropriate.'

The inquiry, before Lady Smith, continues.