

# Southport Inquiry

## ANNEX A: WITNESS STATEMENT

Witness Name: Claudia Aldersley

Exhibits: CA/01- CA/13

Dated: 04 August 2025

### THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

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[FIRST] WITNESS STATEMENT OF Claudia Aldersley

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I, **Claudia Aldersley**, will say as follows: -

#### INTRODUCTION

1. I am a Therapeutic Counsellor.
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the “**Inquiry**”) with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 15 July 2025.

#### BACKGROUND

3. In the period 2019- 2020, I was Therapeutic Counsellor and also Project Lead with Parenting 2000.
4. My role at the time involved working with children and young people who required therapeutic counselling on a 1:1 basis. I also delivered a programme for parents called Youth Connect 5 which is based on psycho-education and support for parents with children with low level mental health difficulties.

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5. I am a qualified counsellor, as well as former teacher, with a Level 4 in Therapeutic Counselling. I have a further qualification in Counselling Children and Young People. At the time of seeing AR I was a registered member of the counselling professional body the BACP. I had a Level 3 Safeguarding certificate and have had a previous role working as a teacher within a multi-agency team alongside an adolescent social care team.
6. Since 2020 I have become an accredited member of the BACP and have taken on managerial roles both within Parenting 2000 (Therapeutic Lead) and within a Mental Health Support Team. I am currently Clinical Operations Lead at Parenting 2000.

## **NARRATIVE OF MY INVOLVEMENT**

7. My involvement with AR and his family began on 30 May 2019. AR's father had requested privately funded therapy with Parenting 2000, this was to enable him to be seen sooner whilst they waited for his NHS funded referral (also with Parenting 2000) to work its way up the waiting list. The key presenting issue at this stage was anxiety. The referral form completed by AR's father is exhibited as CA/01 PAR2000003
8. I also worked with AR's father. He attended a Youth Connect 5 parent's group which started on 27.02.2020. This was a weekly group running over 5 weeks and on this occasion was only offered to Dads and male carers. Initially this was delivered by me at our Southport office but was moved on line once the country went in to Covid lockdown. AR's dad attended each week and I felt was fully engaged, he seemed to enjoy the company of other men on the group who were very supportive of him as he had previously described himself as quite isolated.
9. The Youth Connect 5 programme is described on their website "as a course that gives parents and carers across Cheshire and Merseyside the knowledge, skills and understanding to help children develop strong emotional wellbeing through resilience-building techniques. These techniques will strengthen your child's ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even stress, skills that will remain with them into adulthood. We like to think of it as being able to bounce back from difficult experiences."

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10. AR's Dad described how much of the information was new to him, he spoke of how, in his country of origin, mental health was rarely referred to and was often stigmatised. He appeared to feel reassured by the stories of the other men in the group who also struggled in their relationships with their children. I asked AR's dad to write a testimonial regarding the course for me to use when feeding back to the funder of the parent course which is exhibited here as CA/02. PAR2000006
  
11. Initially AR received 7 counselling sessions with me funded by his father. The dates of these sessions were 30.05.2019, 27.06.2019, 11.07.2019, 25.07.2019, 08.08.2019, 12.09.2019, 03.10.2019. My counselling notes for the entirety of the time I saw AR are exhibited as CA/03. PAR2000005  

The themes discussed in session were AR's symptoms of anxiety, particularly in relation to eating in public, fear of others hearing him swallow when stressed and the fear of public speaking in school. Sessions involved psycho-education around the links between thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical symptoms. We also practised techniques such as mindfulness, breathing exercises and managing unhelpful thoughts. We would record these on 'Thought Record Sheets' along with other written notes from sessions exhibited as CA/04. PAR2000007

On 14.10.2019 the admin team received a call from AR's Dad to say he would like the privately funded sessions to go on hold until AR's referral reaches the top of the CCG (NHS) waiting list.
  
12. A day later on 15.10.2019 I took a phone call from Dad to say that AR had taken a knife in to school, that AR had told Childline who had reported it to school and that this had resulted in permanent exclusion. Dad was now seeking further support for AR. I was able to transfer AR to the 'Sunshine and Showers' project to provide free funded counselling within Parenting 2000.
  
13. In 2019, Parenting 2000 won a bid to develop what we called the Sunshine and Showers (SAS) project- this was a project funded by Sefton Council for children and young people who were at risk of entering the criminal justice system and funded therapeutic interventions. This project lasted for a year.

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14. From October 2019 all the counselling sessions were funded by the SAS Project and I continued to see AR. I saw AR for a further 14 counselling sessions between 17.10.2019 until 19.05.2020. The dates of these sessions were 17.10.2019, 31.10.2019, 14.11.2019, 05.12.2019, 07.01.2020, 14.01.2020, 21.01.2020, 28.01.2020, 06.02.2020, 13.02.2020, 27.02.2020, 16.04.2020, 12.05.2020, 19.05.2020. In this time there were also 3 appointments not attended with no notice- 21.11.2019, 02.06.2020 and 24.06.2020 and one late cancellation on 12.12.2019.
  
15. The themes of these sessions were now significantly different. We concentrated on AR's feelings of anger and explored how his feelings of injustice fed this emotion. We also looked at his responsibility for his actions and possible other ways to demonstrate the emotion. AR also discussed how he didn't feel listened to/heard, particularly in relation to the bullying he described at his secondary school and also with his mum, who he felt favoured his older brother and that both his parents refused to acknowledge that his brother was 'faking' his disability. We recorded our exploration of AR's perceived injustice as mind maps and I exhibit [PAR2000001] CA/05. In all of these records I do the writing, whilst AR tells me what to write. On one occasion (06.02.2020) AR's mum attended our session whilst AR presented a mind map on 'what I'd like mum to know' [PAR2000008] CA/06) Mum appeared attentive and reflective. In preparation for this session there was another list created [PAR2000002] CA/07) which was also what AR would like mum to know. In this he refers to an 'incident with [DPA] however I am unsure who this was and have no record what this pertains to and therefore cannot comment on its relevance. The mind map used in the session was the one listed as exhibit CA/05. There is also a further document referring to ARs brother (exhibit CA/08) [PAR2000009]
  
16. AR also created a mind map of 'what I would like school to know' but at the time didn't want to share this with anyone [PAR2000010] CA/09). This refers to the bullying he felt wasn't dealt with by school and he felt he was punished through the exclusion but that the bully wasn't punished. The reverse side of this mind map [PAR2000011] CA/10) shows the session where we consider what might have prevented AR bringing the knife in to school and AR cites, in order of importance, 1) when I first told them they stopped [DPA] from bullying, 2) wish that there had been some other support which would have prevented me bringing the knife, 3) given me a second chance.

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17. AR's sense of injustice then extended to his new school who he thought had taken some of his comments out of context and used them against him. We also spoke of AR's possible Autism and how this may contribute to some of his feelings of injustice, lack of emotional regulation and anxious feelings. At this point, AR was on the pathway but not yet diagnosed.
18. During the period October 2019 and May 2020, I instigated conversations with other professionals working with AR. These were intended to be opportunities to share information in order to gain further support as opposed to reporting safeguarding concerns. This included a phone call to the CAMHS crisis line on Oct 17<sup>th</sup>- I will refer to this in more detail later on. I spoke with AR's key worker for the Children and Family Wellbeing Service, Lucy Parkinson on two occasions regarding the support we offered AR. On 16.01.2020 Lucy pointed me in the direction of his new Social worker, Anna Jamieson who I emailed on the same day. AR had given permission to share his work on 'what I would like school (Range) to know' but as he was now excluded it was unsure how this could happen, I had hoped that his social worker may have been able to facilitate this. I have no record nor do I recall hearing back from the social worker. This email is PAR2000004 CA/11. I was also invited to a Team around the Family (TAF) meeting on 21.11.2019, I shared pertinent information with Joanne Hodson, the Deputy Headteacher and Senco At The Acorns school (this is CA/12 PAR2000012) but didn't attend the meeting in person.
19. After the second offence at Range High School in January and AR's impending appearance in court I communicated with Nick Thomas from Youth Justice Liaison in South Sefton. He sent over information designed to reassure the family about AR's court appearance and I relayed to him the nature of my work with AR and the particular focus we had on working with AR's sense of injustice- these emails are exhibited as CA/13 PAR2000013
20. After March 2020, in Covid lockdown all of our counselling services moved online. The sessions with AR became different in that his anxiety was reduced significantly. We considered how he might manage his anxiety when out on his daily walk. AR struggled with the online format of counselling and it felt he had little to say in sessions so we reduced the frequency. By June 2020 he didn't attend sessions any more. I completed a final session with AR's dad on 18.06.2020, teaching him an 'anchoring' technique which

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he could use with AR. Dad reported that CAMHS were now involved and that an EHCP was in progress. I offered one more session for AR on 24.06.2020 but he didn't attend. I had no more involvement with the family from there.

21. AR disclosed in our sessions a growing sense of injustice around how he was not listened to, both in the context of the bullying in school and within his family. This created angry feelings within him which he felt were justified.

## **ISSUES RELEVANT TO MY INVOLVEMENT**

22. My call to the CAMHS crisis line on 17/10/19 had two purposes. One was to share information with a more specialist service around my concerns that AR lacked understanding around the consequences of taking the knife in to school and therefore was unable to engage in exploring different ways he could have expressed his anger on this day. I felt he needed more specialist support. The CAMHS worker explained that AR was referred to Targeted Support and this was the correct service for young people in this situation and that he would receive support around knife crime.
23. The second purpose of the call was to ask if it would be possible, in light of his recent behaviour and exclusion from school, to have his appointment for an ASD diagnosis expedited, as I felt AR would receive more support if this diagnosis came through quicker. The CAMHS worker explained to me that there were no reasons why an appointment is ever expedited on the ASD pathway and there would be little point in the parents returning to the GP to ask for this.
24. I fed back the outcome of the phone call to AR's dad. I didn't take any further steps after the phone call.
25. Any concerns I had around AR's home were in relation to his disclosures around not feeling heard by his parents, particularly that he thought his older brother was favoured and that he was 'faking' his disability and AR felt his parents were unwilling to acknowledge this. I didn't have any safeguarding concerns around AR's home.

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26. I was concerned that AR had carried a knife in to school and expressed a desire and intent to attack the 'bully' and the further offence in January 2020 when he returned to school and assaulted a boy with a hockey stick. In our work together, I felt that AR showed an inability to understand the consequences of his action, a significant lack of empathy or proportion. This is the point at which I contacted the CAMHS crisis line (17/10/2019) to report my concerns over this.
27. I had no sense, at the time, from our sessions that AR had an interest in violence beyond the matter discussed. He did not disclose anything to me to indicate this.

## **INVOLVEMENT WITH OTHER AGENCIES**

28. Any communication with other agencies, e.g. CAMHS, youth justice, social care felt appropriate, relevant and open in its nature.

## **REFLECTION OF EVENTS**

29. On reflection I feel that the work completed with AR, with the information he was sharing with me at the time, was appropriate. I feel I was able to use some of his disclosures around his feelings of injustice and bring to the family's awareness. I also attempted to facilitate more specialist support around him requiring higher level mental health intervention as well as a timely ASD diagnosis to the attention of CAMHS. Once AR became increasingly disengaged I was able to offer his Dad support and more knowledge in terms of the parent course Youth Connect 5.
30. In terms of organisational improvements since 2019/20 Parenting now has a more collaborative approach to safeguarding with 2 clinical leads (one being myself) and the Safeguarding Lead (the CEO) to look at issues around communicating with outside agencies. This also provides a space for discussion around concerns and clinical queries not just safeguarding and I feel this would have offered me more support at the time and perhaps more ideas.
31. I do feel that the guidance, training and resources I had at the time were adequate for the involvement I had. Once I began to feel that further, higher level intervention was

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required, this was the point at which I raised my concerns with CAMHS. I continued to work with AR on a specific focus knowing that he had other specialist support in the form of Targeted Support, social care and had completed a psychiatric assessment when in custody.

## **IMPROVEMENTS**

32. Improvements have been made within Parenting 2000, both since 2019/20 and since the attacks in 2024.
33. There have been significant improvements within the organisation since 2019/20. There is now a larger safeguarding team including 2 clinical leads, the CEO and an Early Help Lead. A larger team allows for a more collaborative approach where queries, of both a safeguarding and clinical nature, are welcomed.
34. Improvements have also been made to internal safeguarding training especially at induction stage, in addition to the usual external safeguarding training. Since 2024 a training package was introduced to all new staff, trainees & volunteers, which is now mandatory. This includes safeguarding and Prevent training.
35. Since 2024, I am also attending a multi-disciplinary meeting, within my Clinical Lead role, with all NHS partners working with children and young people's mental health in Sefton. In attendance is also the Clinical Lead for Sefton CAMHS. This meeting allows cases to be discussed to find the most suitable and timely mental health intervention for that child/young person. This includes a particular focus on children who are also involved with social care/Early Help. This has massively improved communication with other partners as well as a better understanding around the roles of other agencies.
36. I feel an improvement that could be made, if not already done so, is a clear way to expedite those on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder pathway that may have a more acute need for a quicker diagnosis, for e.g. a young person excluded from school.  
  
Also, a shared regional data base for mental health and social care professionals which supports information sharing and collaborative working whilst being mindful of confidentiality and data sharing.

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## **Other matters**

37. I do not have any other relevant matters that I wish to draw to the Chairman's attention.

## **Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: **Signature**

Dated: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2025

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## ANNEX B: EXHIBIT INDEX TEMPLATE

### Index to the Witness Statement of Claudia Aldersley

Exhibit No.	Inquiry reference No.	Document description
1	CA/01- PAR2000003	(Therapeutic services referral form received 08/05/2019, completed by AR's father.
2	CA/02 PAR2000006	Testimonial from AR's Dad RE parent course
3	CA/03 PAR2000005	Counselling notes - session log sheet
4	CA/04 PAR2000007	Mind map on things AR found 'Unfair' (recorded by CA with AR dictating)
5	CA/05 PAR2000001	Mind map on 'Mum- this is what I want you to know' (recorded by CA with AR dictating)
6	CA/06 PAR2000008	List 'Mum- this is what I want you to know'
7	CA/07 PAR2000002	List titled 'Dion'
8	CA/08 PAR2000009	Mind map on 'What I would like Range to know' (recorded by CA with AR dictating)
9	CA/09 PAR2000010	Mind map on 'This is what I would have liked to have happened' (recorded by CA with AR dictating).
10	CA/10 PAR2000011	mind map AR 'This is what I would have liked to have happened.' 28-01-20
11	CA/11 PAR2000004	Email to social worker 16 01 2020
12	CA/12 PAR2000012	AR emails with Acorns school 26-11-2019
13	CA/13 PAR2000013	AR Emails with Youth Justice 06-02-2020 to 10-02-2020