

## IN THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

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### CLOSING SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF DION R

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#### Introduction

1. Dion R (Dion) appreciates that the decision to grant him Core Participant status may have been difficult for some of the Core Participants to understand. However, he remains grateful to the Chair for allowing him the opportunity to learn more about the actions and, in some cases, inactions of people and organisations involved with AR. Further, he hopes that his witness statement and oral evidence on 4 and 5 November 2025, has provided the Inquiry with an insight into life in the family home.
2. On any view, the evidence demonstrates that this family was living in circumstances that were so far removed from most people's concepts of 'normal' family life that it makes it difficult to understand how they functioned on a daily basis. The Inquiry may conclude that AR himself knew his anger and reactions to being bullied was not normal, as is evident from AR's contact with Childline in October 2019.<sup>1</sup>
3. Thereafter, AR's unpredictability, propensity to have violent outbursts, his worsening mental health, his complete and total isolation from the outside world (to identify just a few recurring features of the evidence), all combined to create a household like no other. When assessing and judging the steps taken by

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<sup>1</sup> **MERP001029** (transcript of AR's contact with Childline on 5 October 2019)

teachers, professionals from the Youth Justice Board, social services, dieticians, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Dion's parents, the Inquiry may wish to bear in mind the following evidence:

- a. Maggie Allred (specialist teacher) correctly described AR as *"one of the most complex pupils I've ever taught because it was so difficult to see his needs and the risks."*<sup>2</sup>
- b. Joanne Hodson (Headteacher at Acorns) described AR as *"a highly unusual pupil, the most unusual I had experienced during my career. At Acorns, we educate and support young people with a range of complex needs however I have never come across a pupil like AR."*<sup>3</sup>
- c. In his witness statement, Alphonse R stated, *"AR's behaviour was not at all normal and we knew there was a serious issue. The medication was not working and there appeared to be serious side effects. AR was of low mood (depressed) all the time. None of the interventions had a positive impact and AR was refusing to further engage with CFWS and CAMHS. We were really struggling at home and we did not know what to do."*<sup>4</sup>
- d. In her witness statement, Laetitia described life at home in this way, *"The difficulty was that even when things were calm one day, it might not be the same the next day or the day after that. Our lives over these years were a series of ups and downs, going from one episode of crisis to the next. I do not know why A acted the way he did, and the psychiatrists and doctors were unable to explain it. It was very traumatic, and I felt like we were surviving from day-to-day."*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> MERP000786\_0004

<sup>3</sup> Joanne Hodson 23 October 2025, 101/11-14

<sup>4</sup> IWS000058\_0038, para 179

<sup>5</sup> IWS000056\_0033, para 140

4. However, the evidence makes plain that a great many families have to learn to adapt and cope with the additional needs that come with raising an autistic child. As Louise Anderson (Director of Children’s Social Care at Lancashire County Council) stated *“There are 5,000 children in Lancashire at the moment with autism as their primary need with an EHCP plan. What we know is that, if you look at various reports, anywhere between 50 and 60 per cent of parents report violent outbursts from their children and aggression from their children. When we are considering risk, we think about frequency and severity and, sadly, many parents with children with SEND needs/autism needs -- and there has been a national conversation about this -- many parents face real difficulties in their home in terms of behaviour at a much higher frequency and with much greater severity.”*<sup>6</sup>
  
5. It is important therefore not to view AR’s case as being an ‘outlier’ or an ‘anomaly’ but rather that he was boy that, like so many, needed significant intervention, support and help. It is equally important that the impact of AR’s autism is not overstated as being the main or indeed only cause of AR’s behaviour and/or any explanation for the attack. When Dion himself was asked if he knew of any reason why AR might attack a dance class, he said *“not this particular class but ... Just sort of generally in that children are very valuable to society, in that they're society's future and that it would hit society particularly badly if something like this happened. And I think that would have been -- it could be something along those lines. But this is only a thought I could have had in retrospect.”*<sup>7</sup>

### **Systemic Failures**

6. These closing submissions are designed to assist the Chair in his examination of whether there were opportunities to manage the risk AR posed to the public. Dion was not involved in or aware of a great number of the areas examined by the Inquiry but does consider that the Inquiry’s evidence demonstrates systemic

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<sup>6</sup> Louise Anderson 3 November 2025, 145/12-24

<sup>7</sup> Dion R 5 November 2025, 70/25-71/12

and other failures by many organisations including by the Youth Offending Team, CAMHS, Lancashire Police and Lancashire County Council Children's Social Care.<sup>8</sup>

7. In relation to CAMHS, it is highly likely that by the Autumn of 2019, AR was exhibiting obvious signs of autism.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Joanne Hodson said that it was her "*immediate impression*" when she first met AR in December 2019 that he was on autistic spectrum.<sup>10</sup> That it took 15 months thereafter (until February 2021) for AR to be formally diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder is a national disgrace. Whilst the pressures brought to bear on CAMHS by the increase in children seeking help and support for mental health issues are not insubstantial, it is unacceptable for children to wait months, if not years, for a diagnosis.
8. Following his autism diagnosis, AR was under the care of Dr Ramasubramanian (from July 2021 to June 2022) and subsequently Dr Molyneux (from July 2022 to April 2024). The evidence suggests that there was an insufficient handover to Dr Ramasubramanian as she was mainly reliant on the information contained in the electronic patient record.<sup>11</sup> There were clearly flaws in the design of the electronic patient system which meant that not all other records were accessible/easily accessible. As Dr Killen accepted, "*the electronic patient record was not facilitating practitioners picking up pertinent information.*"<sup>12</sup> Only CAMHS records were available to Dr Ramasubramanian and it is clear she was unaware of a great deal of important information including for example, about AR's online searches.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Louise Anderson accepted that following the incident on 17 March 2022, Lancashire had an opportunity to convene a multi-agency risk assessment "*which, with what we know now, would have made a huge difference to what happened in the future. We absolutely take responsibility for our part and we want to say sorry and I want to say sorry.*" Louise Anderson 3 November 2025, 156/1-5 and Ms Bibby-Roberts accepted that she "sadly" did not consider the Youth offending Team Workers to be "relentless in their engagement" with AR (Stephanie Bibby-Roberts 4 November 2025, 56/15-19  
<sup>9</sup> LANC000004\_0004 (Minutes of strategy discussion from 17 December 2019)

<sup>10</sup> Joanne Hodson 23 October 2025, 99/19-100/7

<sup>11</sup> Dr Ramasubramanian 20 October 2025, 104/24-105/2

<sup>12</sup> Oonagh Killen 20 October 2025, 161/10-12

<sup>13</sup> Dr Ramasubramanian 20 October 2025, 104/3-4

9. Equally, as the handover to Dr Ramasubramanian was deficient, so too was the handover to Dr Molyneux, which, as Dr Ramasubramanian accepts, “*did not go into a lot of details about the previous involvement with Prevent or FCAMHS...*”<sup>14</sup> Concerns about the sufficiency of the handover were compounded by the fact that Dr Molyneux did not read the whole of AR’s electronic patient record<sup>15</sup> and did not have knowledge of a large body of information about AR.<sup>16</sup> Had Dr Molyneux read the electronic patient record and been aware of more information about AR, it may have sparked professional curiosity in him to try understand why, particularly given AR’s anxiety and distrust, AR could not engage with CAMHS. Had there been a more comprehensive understanding of AR’s background, AR’s lack of engagement would have been a clear warning sign to CAMHS that AR was not just “*an unremarkable, sullen, untalkative, gawky teenage boy*” but a boy who needed significant support, if not from CAMHS, from other agencies.<sup>17</sup>

10. It is equally clear that record keeping and the sharing of records across agencies was a problem in AR’s case. In relation to information sharing, the absence of a centralised recording system means that a parent who has a problem or a concern about their child has to report this to each and every agency/organisation individually. The Inquiry may be of the view that, in 2025, there must be a way of ensuring, for example, that a record of a report to the police that involves a risk to the child and/or the public (or both), could be accessed by, or proactively brought to the attention of, for example, social services, CAMHS and schools.

11. In relation to police involvement with AR, and as set out in his witness statement, Dion was at home on the four occasions that police were called from the home about AR (5 November 2021, 30 November 2021, 17 March 2022 and 14 May 2022). From Dion’s perspective, these incidents reflect AR’s worrying and frightening behaviour during an outburst/moment of crisis. In

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<sup>14</sup> Dr Ramasubramanian 20 October 2025, 142/18-20

<sup>15</sup> Dr Molyneux 20 October 2025, 6/4-8 and 7/4-12

<sup>16</sup> Dr Molyneux 20 October 2025, 11/4-15/11

<sup>17</sup> AHCH000253\_0013, para 34

respect of the 17 March 2022, the Inquiry will note that Dion was “*surprised the police had let him go*” as he thought “*the incident was serious and I would have expected him to be kept in police custody.*”<sup>18</sup> The Inquiry is aware that, during PC Fairclough’s evidence, PC Fairclough now accepts that he ought to have arrested AR on 17 March 2022.<sup>19</sup> The Inquiry may therefore have little trouble in concluding therefore that the events of 17 March 2022 represent a genuine missed opportunity to assess AR’s risk of harm.<sup>20</sup>

12. In his opening statement, Mr Nick Moss KC, Counsel to the Inquiry posed this pertinent question, “*First, who and what bodies actually took responsibility for positive action and intervention meaningfully to address the risks that AR posed. Or was there a pattern of referral, consideration and either rejection of the referrals or holding open his case before closure or passing him onto other agencies. In other words, who if anyone took ownership?*”<sup>21</sup> That latter question was rightly asked of a multitude of witnesses. The answers resoundingly suggest that there was a spectacular and worrying lack of clarity about which agency was the lead agency responsible for assessing any risk that AR posed.

## **Dion’s Evidence**

13. On behalf of Dion, it is submitted that Dion gave his evidence with honesty, candour and without guile. We are grateful to the Inquiry for granting Dion special measures to assist him in giving evidence and have no doubt that the Inquiry will take into account Dion’s own diagnosis of autism when analysing his evidence. Indeed, it was obvious to those who could see Dion and to everyone who could hear him give evidence, that Dion was doing his level best to answer truthfully even though it was evidently painful and difficult for him to do so. To the extent that Dion’s account of the morning of 29 July 2024 differs from that of his parents, it is submitted that the Inquiry can safely rely on Dion’s

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<sup>18</sup> IWS000060\_0020, para 86

<sup>19</sup> PC Fairclough 7 October 2025, 17/5-9

<sup>20</sup> See further Louise Anderson 3 November 2025, 156/1-5

<sup>21</sup> Counsel to the Inquiry’s opening statement, 16 September 2025, 155/10-16

account as being accurate and truthful and the Inquiry will wish to consider that much of Dion's evidence is supported by other material.<sup>22</sup>

14. When assessing Dion's evidence, it is important to bear in mind:

- a. For much of the period under examination (c. mid 2019-July 2024), Dion was himself a child and so liaison and engagement with the agencies involved in AR's case was understandably left to his parents, as the primary care givers, to manage.
- b. It is a sad reality that Dion was scared of his brother's outbursts<sup>23</sup> and so had to protect himself by modifying his behaviour to limit his exposure to AR. This resulted in Dion spending increasing amounts of time in his own bedroom.
- c. Dion's own physical disability hampered his ability to move freely around the house requiring as he does, assistance of his parents to use the manual stair climber. Importantly, photos of AR's bedroom demonstrate that it would not be possible for Dion's wheelchair to enter beyond the threshold of AR's room,<sup>24</sup> and, as Dion explained, he never went into AR's room.<sup>25</sup>
- d. Throughout much of this period, and notwithstanding the Covid-19 lockdowns, Dion excelled at school and was studying for both his GCSEs and A levels and from Autumn 2022, Dion was away from home studying at university returning only at the end of terms.

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<sup>22</sup> For example, Dion's evidence that his brother lacked empathy is supported by the evidence of numerous professionals who interacted with AR, including Skott Morgan (CAMHS practitioner). See LCC000029 (letter dated 14 February 2020).

<sup>23</sup> The Inquiry will recall Alphonse's evidence that he cried when he "*heard what Dion had said about his experience at home.*" Alphonse R 5 November 2025, 101/13-14

<sup>24</sup> MERP007784\_0201, 250-251

<sup>25</sup> Dion R 4 November 2025, 191/11-12

- e. Post the attack, in addition to the absolute shock and horror at his brother's action, there was significant upheaval to Dion's family life and living arrangements.

15. In light of Dion's age, life and living arrangements at the relevant time, it is entirely understandable that there were topics that Dion was unable to assist with. It was not until post-attack and/or disclosure was made by the Inquiry that Dion came to learn of the extent of his brother's activities.

- a. As Dion made clear in his witness statement, he had "*no idea*" that AR was looking at or watching videos of extreme violence or school massacres.<sup>26</sup>
- b. Dion only came to learn of the Prevent Referrals after the attack.<sup>27</sup>
- c. Whilst Dion was aware that his brother would make online purchases, he did not know what AR was purchasing until after the attack. It should be noted that when at home, Dion did not take delivery of any packages that AR had ordered, nor did he touch the packages or look at the contents.<sup>28</sup>
- d. In relation to the 22 July 2024, Dion's knowledge of this incident comes solely from that which he was told by his father.<sup>29</sup> Importantly, as Dion said both in his witness statement and in evidence, Dion was not aware that AR was in possession of a knife on 22 July 2024.<sup>30</sup>
- e. Save for the packaging seen on the morning of 29 July 2024, Dion had no knowledge that his brother had made online purchases of knives or

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<sup>26</sup> IWS000060\_0013 para 63

<sup>27</sup> IWS000060\_0012, para 59

<sup>28</sup> IWS000060\_0024 para 102 and 0025 para 107

<sup>29</sup> In his witness statement, Alphonse R confirms he told Dion "*to be careful around AR.*" IWS000058\_0053 para 260. When considering evidence relating to 22 July 2024, the Inquiry may also wish to have regard to LCC000223\_0004

<sup>30</sup> IWS000060\_0025 para 108; Dion R 5 November 2025, 44/15-17

other weapons.<sup>31</sup> He only found out about AR's possession of materials used to prepare ricin after the attack.<sup>32</sup>

16. As Dion made clear in his statement, "*AR's behaviour at this time [late 2019], and during the years that followed, was not, however, consistently violent or erratic. He would have better times when he was calmer, and some worse days when he was angrier. He was always unpredictable but I felt that any threat of violence would only ever be aimed at me or my parents.*"<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that by July 2024, AR had not spoken to Dion for over a year and AR did not speak to his brother when Dion came home on Friday 26 July 2024. Dion did not know or have any reason to suspect that AR was planning an attack.

## Education

17. The Inquiry heard that in years 7 and 8, AR's attendance at Range High School was "*excellent*" and he was "*not known at the school for having any major behavioural concerns.*"<sup>34</sup> However, it is clear that towards the end of year 8, AR told his family that he was being bullied and Dion thought that his father had raised this with the school.<sup>35</sup> Although Dion had not witnessed AR being bullied himself, he was aware from people in AR's year group that AR was being bullied and saw nothing to contradict what he was being told.<sup>36</sup>

18. Whilst Dion is aware that Range High School denies that AR was being bullied, the evidence undoubtedly demonstrates that by the time AR contacted Childline in October 2019, AR genuinely believed that he was being bullied. Indeed, the messages between AR and Childline show, as per Dion's evidence on this topic, that AR had told his parents about the bullying.<sup>37</sup> Given the divergence of evidence on this topic, it is a matter for the Inquiry whether it feels it can safely conclude that the evidence definitively shows that AR was not being

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<sup>31</sup> IWS000060\_0024 para 105

<sup>32</sup> INW000060\_0024 para 104

<sup>33</sup> IWS000060\_0007, para 29

<sup>34</sup> RAN000039\_000 para 12

<sup>35</sup> Dion R 4 November 2025, 196/15-24

<sup>36</sup> Dion R 4 November 2025, 197/4-5

<sup>37</sup> MERP000946\_0002

bullied. However, even if the Inquiry does come to that conclusion, that finding does not mean that more should not have been done to ascertain why a young boy who was not in fact being bullied, was so adamant that he was. AR's Childline call was something SOS signal to alert the authorities that not only was action needed to safeguard the school, but that AR himself needed help and support.

19. In relation to the Childline call, whilst Dion was aware at the time that that AR admitted he (AR) carried a knife to school (and that this was why AR was excluded), Dion did not know that AR had said he had carried a knife on 10 occasions until after AR had been expelled. Dion in no way condones his brother's actions. It is clear that Range High School had to take steps to protect staff and students from the risk posed by AR. However, as Dion told the Inquiry, whilst AR's expulsion from Range High School was understandable, it did not address AR's underlying issues and to understand why as, AR told Childline, he was feeling so scared.<sup>38</sup> In his statement, Dion said "*I remember he [AR] was distraught about the expulsion and he cried a lot*".<sup>39</sup> As Ms Robert-Bibby (Chief Executive Officer of the Youth Justice Board) stated "*Our evidence shows us if we meet the child's needs, address those needs robustly, that we have a much greater chance of protecting the public and reducing harm to others.*"<sup>40</sup>

20. For Dion, the expulsion marked a significant change in AR and was the start of AR's gradual withdrawal from and distrust of society. AR no longer had contact with his friends and his growing anxiety meant he would rarely leave the house and found it difficult to speak with professionals who attended the house. This resulted, by 2024, with AR only interacting with his parents, predominantly his mother. This accords with the evidence given by Dion's mother who told the Inquiry, "*and then it got worse after he was expelled, where he became another person. He changed. He changed significantly from being that normal boy.*"<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Dion R, 5 November 2025, page 6/5-11; MERP001209\_0005

<sup>39</sup> IWS000060\_0005, para 23

<sup>40</sup> Stephanie Roberts-Bibby 4 November 2025, 6/3-6

<sup>41</sup> Laetitia M 6 November 2025, 124/19-22. See also IWS000056\_0011

21. Post his expulsion from Range High School, it is clear that Dion's parents wished fervently for AR to return to school. Not only did they believe in the importance of education but it was an opportunity for AR to begin to engage with others in society again and hopefully, in the most supportive manner, help him build trust with others and address his fears associated with the outside world. As Dion said in his statement, his parents spent "*hours every day trying to convince*" AR to go to school.<sup>42</sup> The suggestion that AR could somehow be forced to go to school ignores the reality of the practical difficulties of forcing any teenager to go to school, let alone a teenage boy with AR's tendency to lash out. As Dion said in his witness statement "*I have been asked by the Inquiry whether, on reflection, I consider there was anything further that my family or the schools could have done to encourage AR to engage or re-engage with his education at Acorns and Presfield. I do not believe there was anything more that could realistically have been done.*"<sup>43</sup>

### **Criticism of Dion's parents**

22. Dion is aware that substantial criticisms have been levelled at his parents, in particular his father. It is no part of these submissions to defend, excuse or seek to mitigate any failings by his parents. They have provided lengthy statements and have given evidence attesting to their own actions and inactions. Importantly, they have both provided the Inquiry with genuine and heartfelt apologies speaking of their utter heartbreak and devastation at what AR has done.<sup>44</sup> Dion trusted his parents and it is wholly understandable that any apprehension Dion felt when AR left the house on the morning of 29 July was appeased by the calmness of his parents' response. Having just returned home from University and having been warned by his father 'to be careful around AR', it was natural for Dion to let his parents take the lead in dealing with the fact that AR left the house that morning.

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<sup>42</sup> IWS000060\_0011, para 50

<sup>43</sup> IWS000060\_0010, para 48

<sup>44</sup> IWS000058\_0050 para 249 and \_0059 para 285; Laetitia M 6 November 2025 pages 118/17-119/11

23. The criticisms of his parents, especially his father, have been particularly difficult and painful for Dion to hear. From Dion's perspective, his parents provided him with a loving home where they nurtured his educational and extracurricular ambitions whilst at the same time doing their utmost to cope with and care for his physical disability. As Dion explained, the family lived with the fear that AR could lash out and be violent towards them. His parents desire to try and prevent these outbursts to protect not just themselves but also Dion was understandable. It is clear that having experienced the atrocities of the Rwandan genocide, they wanted to provide their sons with the best opportunities in life and an easier life than the ones which they had lived through. It must have been upsetting for them to witness AR's opportunities shrink and vanish. As well as trying to cope with AR's worsening behaviour and maintain their jobs, they had a multiplicity of agencies and organisations to engage with to try and get help for AR. It must have been, on any view, overwhelming for them.

### **Concluding remarks**

24. AR's actions on 29 July 2024 devastated the lives of so many people including that of his own family. Dion considers that given the rise in the use of knives in crime, particularly serious crime committed by children aged 10-17,<sup>45</sup> recommendations that restrict the ability of children aged under 18 to buy knives, whether online or in person, are necessary. Dion also considers that recommendations which focus on the additional steps that internet service providers can take to restrict the ability of children to search for and access harmful/illegal content online would be welcome.

24 November 2025

**JACQUELINE CAREY KC – 2BR**

**GEMMA LUDGATE – BURGESS SALMON**

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<sup>45</sup> Youth Justice Board opening submissions 17 September 2025, 66/5-13