

Victim of child sex abuse carved attacker's initials in her thigh when she wasn't believed by care staff

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A TEENAGE victim of sexual abuse carved her attacker's initials in her thigh with a razor blade when staff at the secure council-run children's home where she was held refused to believe that she was a target of their colleague Gordon Collins, who was jailed last year for molesting and raping young girls in his care.

Holly Hamilton, 26, has spoken for the first time about her desperate struggle to be believed - which also saw her slice open her arms and scrawl a cry for help in her own blood at St Katharine's Secure Unit in **Edinburgh**. She said care workers dismissed her accusations and made her scrub the blood from the walls of her bedroom after she was bandaged up.

Hamilton has chosen to speak out after the Sunday Herald revealed last month that City of Edinburgh Council, which runs the care home, destroyed files which should have been retained for 100 years. Hamilton obtained her records last year and fears some of her files may have been shredded because many incidents were not recorded.

Former carer Collins is serving 10 years in prison for abusing four children, including Hamilton, between 1995 and 2006 at two residential children's homes run by City of Edinburgh Council – St Katharine's and Northfield Young Persons Unit. After an unsuccessful appeal which saw his sentence increased from six years, appeal court judge Lord Brodie said Collins “committed an appalling series of offences involving the predatory sexual abuse of four vulnerable teenaged girls” when he was “in a position of trust” and noted that he has “shown no remorse and continues to deny responsibility for the offences”.

Hamilton was placed in care after her parents split up. “I didn't handle it well,” she admits. “I lost the plot. There was drinking, overdoses, serious self-harming and suicide attempts. They put me in secure for my own safety.”

She was targeted by Collins when she was at St Katharine's in 2006 aged 15. She said: “I remember he came up behind me with a big grin on his face. I got up and he gave me a big hug. It soon changed from your typical hug to more than just a normal hug. And obviously when it was just me and him, more stuff happened.

“It was kisses, then he moved to biting me on the neck, hands down my top, hands down my bottoms. It happened in my bedroom, in the corridors, the gym hall, the education corridor. Basically, any time he could get me by myself.

“It got to the point that he was coming to my bedroom every time he was on shift. I don’t think anyone questioned it because they thought I had a good relationship with him. He was pressuring me at this time, asking me when we could “be together”. It made me feel very anxious and scared. I told him this can’t happen anymore. He kept trying again and again. I was later told by the lead detective that it would have ended up a lot worse for me had it not been found out.”

The abuse was uncovered when other girls in the unit found her diary under her pillow and read entries about unwanted sexual advances by Collins. Hamilton was assigned two care workers and didn’t see her abuser again, but his colleagues refused to believe that she had been abused.

Hamilton said: “I remember one female member of staff said: 'You know lies like that can get people into trouble'. I was told to my face by members of staff that they didn’t believe me. I was a 15-year-old girl. I felt horrendous.

“I carved Gordon’s initials into my leg with a razor. You can still see the scar now. That should have been in my files but it’s not. I cut open my arms and wrote on the wall in blood that nobody believed me. I was made to clean that off after they bandaged me up. That’s not in any of my files. That should be recorded because that’s disturbing behaviour. I have all of my files and none of that is in there so it either wasn’t documented, or it was documented and then it was later destroyed.

“Gordon Collins had a lot of friends in there and I don’t think they wanted to believe it. I think they thought I was a daft little girl making up lies.”

Hamilton added that while she was still in care "the **police** got involved but at that time they concluded that it was my word against his and nothing happened.”

After leaving care, Hamilton tried to forget about the abuse by working two jobs, as a carer by day and a bar manager by night. However, when she was 24 police reopened the case and interviewed her about the abuse. She said: “They mentioned Gordon’s name and it all came back like a flood. I had a breakdown in October 2015 in the run-up to the court case. I haven’t really been well since. I’m not working at the moment.”

Her diary became a key part of the case against Collins. Hamilton found the courage to face her attacker in court. She said: “This may sound horrendous but I hope he doesn’t come back out. I hope he dies in jail. I know he’s in prison now but I’m plagued by him. The flashbacks are like a film playing out. It could be his face or something I was looking

at when the abuse happened. It feels so real. That's what causes the panic attacks and it's why I don't go out a lot. My brain can't get out of that high alert mode. I'm waiting on therapy to try to process it better."

Hamilton has been interviewed by the ongoing Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and is hopeful that changes can be made to better protect children in care.

She added: "I've asked the inquiry to find out what kind of training my carers had that they turned around to me as a 15-year-old girl and said they didn't believe me. I want to know why staff tried to cover each other's backs. I want to know why incidents were not recorded. I want major changes in that sector to stop it happening again."

A City of Edinburgh Council spokesman said: "We are co-operating fully with the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry."

Survivors of abuse can contact the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry by calling 0800 0929300 or emailing talktous@childabuseinquiry.scot.