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EXHIBIT 62

In the North London Coroner's Court
In front of HM Senior Coroner Walker

INQUEST TOUCHING ON THE DEATH OF MOLLY RUSSELL

WITNESS STATEMENT OF IAN RUSSELL

I, **IAN RUSSELL**, WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:

1. I am Ian Russell; father of the late Molly Russell and I write this statement for the purposes of the Inquest into Molly's death. References to 'we' in this statement are to my wife Janet and me unless otherwise stated. Janet has read this statement and agrees with the content.
2. Molly was our youngest child. Janet and I have two older daughters. We have all together prepared a pen portrait of Molly which is exhibited to this statement as exhibit **IR1**. Molly was born on 27 November 2002 in London and at the time of her death she was a pupil at Hatch End High School.
3. Molly's death has left us all devastated but driven to try and ensure other young people are better protected in the future.

2017

4. All the immediate family noticed a change in Molly's behaviour in around the last 12 months of her life. Molly became more withdrawn and spent an increased amount of time alone in her room, but she still happily contributed to family life. Molly also found it hard to get to sleep and it appeared she was often the last of us awake.
5. Like most of us, Molly often had her phone with her although we had a strict rule at home of no phones at the dining table. She used that and her iPod touch for a whole range of things. I knew Molly had an Instagram account and a Twitter account as I also had accounts on these platforms and we 'followed' each other, as did other members of the family. Molly closed the Twitter account of hers that we were all following and it was only after her death that I found out she had opened another account on Twitter.
6. We had a filter through our broadband provider which prevented access to adult content and there were many occasions, over several years given the ages of Molly's sisters, on which as a family we discussed online safety issues. We talked about risks from strangers online, not giving out personal details, only sharing photographs with friends, online bullying – that type of thing.
7. In October 2016 we had been on a family holiday, with Molly happily enjoying the weather in a bikini and none of us recall seeing any scarring or injuries to her mostly exposed body.
8. We thought Molly's changed behaviour in 2017 was just a reflection of normal teenage mood swings, coinciding with puberty and although we were concerned, we were not overly concerned. With the benefit of hindsight, I am able to recall some instances which did not seem as concerning at the time but take on more significance now. For example, on 10 August 2017 Molly did not want to swim at a gathering with friends and said she did not feel well. I remember now that she had a long-sleeved top on despite it being a hot summer day.

9. On 19 August 2017, Molly was very withdrawn at a lunch party and hardly spoke, even when asked questions directly. This was very unusual behaviour for her. Molly also asked to give up horse riding, something she had previously loved doing. She said she felt she had plateaued and that a break might help. We did not want to force her to do it so we agreed.
10. At family celebrations we had begun to let Molly try alcohol (as we had done with her older sisters), such as having a glass of champagne. Molly never showed any interest in getting drunk and I do not recall her ever having more than one glass at these events, although she liked being involved in going round to guests and filling their glasses. I do not recall ever seeing Molly drunk or intoxicated in any way. She never asked us for alcohol and we can think of only one occasion when we lost a small bottle of vodka which we kept in the kitchen for making ice cream. We later found the missing bottle behind the ice cream maker and with hindsight, we wonder whether Molly had taken it.
11. On 17 September 2017, I took an opportunity to talk to Molly while driving, just the two of us were in the car. I explained that we had concerns about her and were worried she might be keeping things to herself. She said, "Oh Dad, it's just a phase I'm going through, hopefully, I'll grow out of it soon."
12. I could not persuade her to elaborate and she showed no signs of distress, rather shrugging off the conversation as if there was nothing to worry about. I said, that if there was not anything more to speak about then, I would not press for an answer. I told her, we loved her dearly and we were always there to support her and I asked her to promise to tell me if anything was ever wrong, anything at all, and told her that I didn't know how we'd carry on if anything were to happen to her. She promised to do so and she seemed rational and calm, certainly not in denial or any distress. I felt we'd made an agreement and as she seemed unflustered by the conversation and had behaved in such a mature manner for a 14 year old, it seemed unnecessary to

pursue the subject. I did not say any of this because I thought Molly was going to harm herself and had I thought that, I would have sought professional help for her.

13. On 4 October 2017, we were all shocked to hear that a distant family friend had taken his own life by hanging. We will never know if this tragic event had any bearing on Molly's death, and we firmly believe that both this sad death and the funeral on 7 November 2017, provided opportunities for the family to discuss the wide-ranging and distressing effects of suicide. As well as feeling the loss ourselves, we clearly saw how our friend's death badly affected his family and closer friends and we talked about how everyone connected wished our friend had been able to talk about his mental illness.
14. Molly took part in these discussions and agreed that our friend's death, and the widespread grief and pain that resulted, might have been avoided if he had been able to talk. We also all promised each other we would talk to someone if we ever found ourselves to be suffering from a similar crisis as we would never want to inflict that amount of pain on anyone close to us.
15. On 23 October 2017, Molly was fitted for a new bra. Her upper body would have been exposed to the fitter, no marks, scratches or scars were reported.
16. In the final two months of her life, Molly was in good spirits and was happily contributing more normally to family life again. Any concerns we may have had were considerably eased. Molly was looking forward to many things: the three November birthday celebrations of the Russell sisters; getting a laptop for her fifteenth birthday; receiving gifts from family friends after their December 2017 trip to New York; our traditional family Christmas; and a long-planned visit to see the musical 'Hamilton' early in the new year.

20 & 21 November 2017

17. Molly attended school as usual on 20 November 2017. Her older sister picked her up from school as she had a rehearsal for the school play and recalls seeing her happily engaging with her friends after the rehearsal. Later that evening Molly asked me once again about a summer 2018 work experience opportunity at the Farnborough Air Show, working with my company. She was keen to work there, and I told her that it should work out but I wouldn't know for certain for a few months. Later that evening, Molly spent time completing her homework and she handed it in using the usual online portal.
18. Then, all five family members watched television together (from 21:00 to 22:30). Afterwards we all made our way to bed. Molly and Janet had a further conversation which is detailed in Janet's statement.
19. At around 07:20 the next morning I was in the kitchen downstairs when I heard Janet scream. I immediately rushed upstairs and when I reached the top of the stairs, I found Janet coming out of Molly's bedroom. Janet said to me 'Don't go in' but I replied that I would go in. Janet went downstairs to call 999.
20. As I entered Molly's bedroom, I found her wardrobe doors open and the clothes it had contained were piled on the floor. I saw Molly in her wardrobe, hanging from a single loop made from a striped yellow dressing gown tie, looped around the wardrobe clothing rail. Molly was side on, her left-side out, she was facing the bedroom window. It looked like Molly had sat on the wardrobe's internal half-height shelves, placed her head loosely in the noose and pushed herself off. Her feet were not touching the wardrobe floor.
21. First, I assumed Molly was dead, then after a few seconds shocked pause, I decided to try to do something. I reached in, my right arm behind her, my left in front and I easily lifted Molly's body free from the ligature. On reflection, maybe her neck was

already stiff, which helped me lift her out so easily. I turned and laid Molly on the 'nest' of clothes in the middle of the bedroom floor, she was cold but not without some body heat. I paused momentarily, assuming again Molly was dead.

22. Our middle daughter joined me, she was understandably very distressed. Again, I decided to do whatever I could, I breathed into Molly's mouth, it was slightly open and her airway seemed not to be blocked. After two breaths, I began CPR. As I compressed Molly's chest, I noticed there was a quiet rasping sound from her mouth.
23. Janet returned to Molly's room, still on the phone, and she relayed a message to our middle daughter to go downstairs and leave the front door open for the paramedics who were already on their way. Without hesitation, she did as requested. Instructions about the rate of CPR compressions were relayed by phone which we tried to follow.
24. Our middle daughter returned to the bedroom. I said to her that I think Molly has gone but I'm not going to stop.
25. Really soon, about 07:25 I think, a paramedic arrived and entered Molly's room. I asked if I should stop CPR. He indicated for me to continue while he checked for a pulse and attached electrodes to Molly's body. He felt Molly's jaw, he said rigor mortis had set in. Eventually he said, he had some very sad news, I could stop CPR and that Molly had died.
26. We all remained in Molly's bedroom while the paramedic began a general initial assessment. Police officers soon arrived and Janet and our middle daughter were persuaded to go downstairs with them to the kitchen, I stayed with the paramedic and Molly. I couldn't leave her. As her pyjama leg was gently lifted by the paramedic, I noticed some dark bruise-like bands around Molly's leg. The paramedic was quick to re-cover Molly's leg. I enquired what the marking might be. The paramedic told me it was a sign of self harming and when I expressed my shock at discovering this, he

reassured me that self harmers generally choose places that are unlikely to be seen by others and I shouldn't blame myself.

27. Police officers returned to the bedroom and I was asked to join my family in the kitchen as a further assessment of Molly's condition and a search of her room would need to be undertaken. I did so.

28. Another police officer came to drive me to our eldest daughter. She had become stuck in traffic but we found her, and I broke the terrible news to her. We both returned home in the police car.

29. At around 11:30 undertakers arrived. We all had the opportunity to see Molly and say goodbye before she was taken away and by midday it was just the four of us at home.

After Molly's death: early information about her social media

30. After Molly's death, in an effort to understand what happened, my eldest daughter and I looked at our computer and family accounts. We also looked together at Molly's Netflix account history, I do not recall exactly when but I could see that I started to view '13 Reasons Why' on 29 November 2017, which must have been after we had seen Molly's Netflix viewing log.

31. We discovered from her Netflix viewing record, that at 00:16 on 21 November 2017, Molly watched the first six minutes of a film comedy called 'Get Hard' and then all 47 minutes of Volume 2, Episode 6 'Tony' of the teenage television series 'Skins'. It is highly likely she watched this in her bedroom, on either her iPhone or iPod Touch. Subsequently, after watching both programmes, I could see nothing obvious that might have impacted Molly's state of mind and it was quite typical of her to watch something before going to sleep.

32. My daughters forwarded to me a screenshot sent by one of Molly's friends of her 'last seen' on WhatsApp, which shows Molly was last visibly using the messaging application at 00:07. A copy is exhibited to this statement as exhibit **IR2**.
33. On the family computer in our study at home, I found that Molly had done a google search for 'how to tie a noose' on Sunday 12 November 2017.
34. I was also able (at that time) to see Molly's Instagram account. Although there were no posts from Molly, it became clear she used this platform to connect frequently with various others. Among the hundreds of usual connections a teenager would have, there were over 40 accounts that she followed and another 10 accounts who followed Molly that, judging by their account names, were connected, in some way, to anxiety, depression, self harm or suicide.
35. Neither Janet nor I knew this type of content was available to children on Instagram. We knew Instagram was widely used by children under 16 and although we were aware of other potential online harms, such as cyberbullying or being contacted by strangers, we had no idea a child could see this type of dark, graphic harmful material on such a global platform. I had never seen anything in my own use of Instagram to suggest this type of material was so readily available and we were shocked at what we saw.
36. Despite it being hugely distressing to do so, we looked at a couple of the public Instagram accounts and found many posts on them to be disturbing and certainly something that anyone suffering with their mental health could easily have been detrimentally affected by. We were shocked by the amount of publicly available posts which depicted self harm and/or suicide, and others with messages of hopelessness and despair. Molly had saved and liked many posts/images of this type. Some examples are below and I exhibit to this statement as **IR3** the material I saved at that time:

- I used to be the one to wonder why people cut, now I'm doing it

- I have more scars than friends
- "See, no scars" But it's all lies. They only check wrists ... NOT THIGHS
- You can't fix me
- Who would love a suicidal girl?
- What is the point of living if no one will ever notice that I am gone?

37. This is just a small selection of the material we found on Molly's Instagram account because I did not want to save any of the more disturbing images we saw, such as graphic images of self harm including recent injuries and videos depicting suicide.

38. On or around 27 January 2019, I became unable to access Molly's Instagram account. I do not know why.

39. I showed the material I had seen in late 2017 / early 2018 to Senior Leadership of local schools all of whom were shocked by it and unaware that such content was so easily available online, just as Janet and I had been. I have had similar reactions from suicide awareness advocates and also spoke at that time to a medical professional who expressed his belief that this material would have contributed to Molly's mental ill health and state of mind.

40. I also looked briefly at Molly's YouTube account and saw a similar pattern: many normal teenage 'likes' and 'follows', but a similar high number of disturbing posts concerning anxiety, depression, self harm and suicide.

41. On the family computer I saw that Molly continued to receive emails after her death from another social media platform, Pinterest. I was shocked to see the subject lines of the emails clearly promoting depressing content. Examples of the emails received are exhibited to this statement as exhibit **IR4**.

Molly's notes

42. We also looked around Molly's bedroom. I found notes which the police had not (contained in exhibit **IR5**) and I also found some small blades, sharp pieces of metal and blood stained tissues hidden in boxes in her bedside chest of drawers. I later found out Molly had alcohol in her body at the time she died. I do not know when or what she drank and we found no alcohol, empty cans or bottles etc in her room after her death.
43. When reading the notes (some I found, some the police found) from Molly's bedroom, copies of which are exhibited as **IR5**, some of the language Molly used seemed to reflect the language of the social media posts she was looking at and I believe social media normalised this type of feeling, perhaps making it harder for Molly to talk to anyone in the offline world about her problems.

Our reflections as a family

44. I set out below our views on how Molly was impacted by harmful content on social media over time and we cannot be certain when Molly first thought about taking her own life. As a family we understand that Molly must have been struggling with her mental health however we do not believe she had planned to do what she did *on that night*. Molly had done things like complete her homework (doing so to her normal standard), and bought a card for her sister's birthday the next day. We all strongly believe that Molly's act that night must have been impulsive and that given her behaviour that evening, and with her sister's 21st birthday the next day, something must have happened after we went to bed, which contributed to Molly ending her life when she did. Neither we nor her friends believe Molly would have planned to end her life on the eve or day of her sister's 21st birthday; it was totally against her nature.

45. Molly's school teachers and her friends had not seen, as we as a family had not seen, any dramatic change in Molly or lowering of her mood other than described above. As I describe below, through the inquest process we have learned a vast amount more about her online world, and as aforementioned I set out below some of the deep concerns we have as a family about how this would have impacted her mental state.

The inquest: further access to Molly's data

46. Through the inquest process we, unlike many other families I have spoken to, have been able to learn a significant amount about Molly's online activities. Gaining access to her iPhone and iPod touch was helpful, however no messages or emails or similar showed anything capable of explaining Molly's actions. Access to her devices also did not give us access to what Molly had been doing on a particular application or platform; this information (save for as described above) has been limited to what we have received through the inquest process.

47. The material disclosed by both Pinterest and Instagram's owner, Facebook / Meta, about what Molly saw in the six months prior to her death on their platforms includes much more of the type of images and content relating to self harm, suicide and hopelessness that my eldest daughter and I first found on the family computer. It is incredibly difficult to look at this material personally and while thinking about Molly seeing such harmful content. The graphic material is shocking, however the relentless messages, images, videos, many in black and white, about despair and hopelessness have a devastating effect. Repeatedly reading, hearing and/or seeing that the world is a dark place, that people will let you down, that you must wear a mask to say 'I am fine' etc has had a profound adverse impact on my mental health.

48. As described above I was aware from Molly's email account that Pinterest were promoting this type of material to Molly. I had an Instagram account at the time of Molly's death and although my usage was minimal, I understood that Instagram

used algorithms to show you images from accounts and hashtags you followed, but also, based on what you looked at, Instagram would show you similar material and aimed to show you 'more of what you would like'.

Instagram and Pinterest after Molly's Death

49. When I first saw Molly's Instagram account after her death I recall seeing that an account called 'Lonely' featured heavily and indeed I now understand that the profile picture she used was an Instagram post from that account. In an attempt to understand more fully what Molly may have been seeing on Instagram, together with my legal representatives, I looked at Instagram after Molly's death and in or around early 2019 we (my lawyers and I) recorded a snapshot of the results available for #lonely, #depression and #sadteens. These are provided as **exhibit IR6**. The contents are horrific. At that time, and I believe at the time Molly was using Instagram, Instagram suggested other similar hashtags and this could often include much darker content, such as #sadteens results having a direct link to #suicideedits. It was also common to see a misspelling such as #lonley or #depressed for example and results of these are also provided in **exhibit IR6**.

50. I am aware that both Pinterest and Instagram say they have taken steps to seek to improve the safety of children on their platforms since Molly's death. From what I have seen, which for Instagram I know is only a tiny fraction of the depressing, hopeless, and/or graphic content that Molly was exposed to, I am now more certain than ever that our initial concerns about the impact on Molly's state of mind and her mental health were valid. We believe that months of exposure to this material on social media, where a drip feed of daily hopelessness was actively promoted to her, affected Molly's decision making and thought processes. While it would be nice to think that some online content might have provided positive support for Molly, overall we believe it normalised, glamourised and even glorified dangerous behaviours. We believe this impacted her thoughts around seeking help and as parents, we had no

idea that this type of content was so readily available and being actively promoted to children on mainstream platforms.

51. Since Molly's death my family and our friends have registered a charitable foundation in her memory, the Molly Rose Foundation. The aim of the Molly Rose Foundation is suicide prevention, targeted towards young people under the age of 25. We want to help spot those suffering with mental health problems and connect them to the help, support and practical advice they need.

52. I have also spoken publicly about the concerns my family have about material relating to suicide, self harm, depression and despair on social media platforms and the fact it is not only accessible but also actually promoted and not just to adults, but also to children.

53. Both personally and through the Molly Rose Foundation, I have been involved in campaigning for more action in relation to the safety of children on platforms such as Instagram. Some steps are being taken to this end, however, it is abundantly clear to me that significant risks still remain and that more can and should be done by both individual companies and Government. I cannot understand why having had this issue brought to their attention, Meta has not taken steps to remove accounts and content from Instagram which is so obviously harmful. Although Meta has not told me what searches Molly carried out on Instagram, Pinterest have provided this information and together with my lawyers, we recently (in June and July 2022) repeated searches for "suicidal quotes" and "depressing quotes".

54. The search results for "suicidal quotes" on Instagram are exhibited as **exhibit IR7** and although there is an option to seek help rather than see the posts, this only appears for the hashtag results and takes one click to bypass. This one search, which Molly as a struggling 14 year old did and which children today with similar feelings may very well replicate on this popular platform, provides access to many many accounts and posts on Instagram that perpetuate hopelessness and/or reference suicide or self harm, with no recovery or positive messaging. The search

results for “depressing quotes” on Instagram are exhibited at **IR8** and provide no signposting to help, rather the results again show the abundance of potentially harmful content available to children.

55. We also repeated these searches on Pinterest and examples of the results are exhibited as **exhibit IR9** and **IR10**. The search results appeared to be ‘an endless scroll’ in that after several minutes scrolling new content was still available so the exhibits contain only a selection of the results. Searching for ‘depressing quotes’ brought up an option to seek help, whereas no such message was displayed for ‘suicidal quotes’, and in any event, like on Instagram, it takes one click to bypass the message and access the results.

56. The results of the Pinterest searches do not contain the same level of graphic material we now know Molly was exposed to on Pinterest and there are some results more focused on recovery and positivity, however there remains easy access to considerable material referencing suicide and material with a theme of despair, depression and/or sadness. I am aware that Pinterest have taken steps to hide the full results of some searches, however the results of these searches, which Molly carried out, including providing a suggestion for ‘quotes for when you wanna die’, confirm my view that Pinterest has not taken sufficient steps to protect children who use their platform.

57. I also do not believe Meta is doing all it can to prevent harmful content on Instagram and its other platforms or to keep children safe. The evidence provided by Frances Haugen, a former employee of Meta, to the Joint Committee on the draft Online Safety Bill in October 2021 was shocking in many respects and I believe relevant to understanding both what Molly was exposed to on Instagram and what is known about the considerable harm being caused to children on Instagram specifically. The publicly available transcript is exhibited as **exhibit IR11**. Ms Haugen’s evidence covered her experience of Facebook’s approach to safety and the repeated promotion of profit over safety [**IR/119, 133**], the algorithms pushing those on the

platform to more extreme content [IR/110-112, 117, 147, 152], and the considerable harm being done to children [IR/124-127, 131]. Ms Haugen and the Committee understand that the “percentage of British teenagers, of those who feel like this, [that] can trace their desire to kill themselves....back to Instagram” is “around 12 or 13%” [IR/124]. I am aware Instagram have stated this is a mischaracterisation of their research, and claim that the actual percentage is much lower. However, I have never seen anything substantial to support this claim or any detailed further explanation, and indeed even a lower percentage of young people having suicidal ideation triggered by a global platform such as Instagram would be exceptionally worrying.

58. Most recently, in August 2022, Meta, in the third statement of Ms Lagone, state they have taken steps to ‘improve searches’ and block results related to “suicide, self-injury and eating disorders” for not only children, but all people using Instagram (paragraph 22). As explained earlier, it is common for hashtags to use misspellings and I have seen various hashtags on the harmful content Molly engaged with on Instagram. Together with my legal team we carried out further searches on Instagram in August 2022 using some of these hashtags and the screenshots of the outcome of these searches, which still contain considerable harmful content, are exhibited as **exhibit IR12**. I welcome the introduction of warnings about content, privacy screens and offers of support provided now in relation to some of the harmful content, however these searches demonstrate how readily available harmful content still is to children on Instagram, and highlights the considerable shortcomings in Meta’s approach to child safety. I have included #bulimic (as well as those relating to suicide, self harm and depression related material) not only because this hashtag appeared on content Molly engaged with on Instagram, but also, and predominantly, because Ms Lagone specifically refers to eating disorders and I wanted to understand more fully the extent to which search terms and results across the three topics she mentioned are in fact still available.

59. Throughout I have felt that Meta have been keen to say they are sympathetic and that they wish to help, however in reality their behaviour has often felt obstructive and their words have not been backed up by their actions. Their behaviour has caused considerable additional distress for my family. Pinterest have been more cooperative, however neither platform appear to take sufficient responsibility for the children on their platforms and keeping them safe. I have repeatedly heard Meta and others seek to emphasise that content related to suicide, self harm, depression and/or hopelessness can be helpful, but I have never been provided with any impartial analysis or assessment of the number of children Instagram or Pinterest have helped or saved as opposed to the numbers of children harmed or killed by this material. These companies hold all the data themselves and I am certain that if they had reliable research to prove the positives of engaging with this type of material, including having it promoted to you, outweigh the clear and considerable negatives for children then we would have been provided with it.

Difficulties Accessing Molly's Data

60. I feel it has been a considerable battle to obtain information about what Molly was exposed to on social media and it appears impossible to obtain full records relating to her online activities. Out of necessity Molly's bedroom was fully searched after her death, with her notebooks, and letters from others for example all available to us in the immediate aftermath of her death. In contrast it has taken years for us to obtain partial records in relation to Molly's online activities and some companies have uncooperatively refused to provide us or the Coroner with Molly's records.

61. I found the approach of Twitter in response to the Schedule 5 Notice from the Coroner distressing. Rather than simply providing the Coroner with the records linked to Molly's Twitter account, which I had not known about prior to her death; the account, '@idfc_nomore', had to be linked to my email address for me to then reset the password, and enter it myself. I downloaded the available material and provided it to my legal representatives. It has been dreadfully upsetting to learn how Molly

used Twitter and had we known about this at the time, we would have immediately taken steps to talk to her and get her professional help. To see that Molly asked for help from 'influencers' she followed and expressed her hopelessness to them, yet these posts appear to have gone into a digital vacuum and were entirely unresponded to, is devastating and reinforces my view that Molly's exposures online led to her seeking help in the wrong place.

62. As mentioned above, through the inquest process the Police were able to access Molly's locked devices, her iPod Touch and her iPhone, both found in her bedroom at the time of her death. Not long after Molly's death I contacted Apple to request help with accessing these devices so that I could more properly understand what may have happened to my daughter. Apple told me that without the passcodes to the devices they were unable (or unwilling) to help.

63. On 23 March 2018, without any warning, 'Molly' left WhatsApp group chats my family had set up. By this I mean a message appeared in those 'chats' that 'Molly had left the group'. At the time I did not know exactly why this had happened and it was a distressing surprise for us all. I was also aware some of Molly's friends continued to message her after her death and I was concerned also about the impact on them. I contacted WhatsApp to ask them for Molly's data and why this had happened. A copy of the correspondence is at exhibit **IR13**. I initially received an automated response referring me to their 'FAQs' and after some further correspondence I was told an account may be deactivated after 30 days inactivity, and that once an account was deleted it could not be restored. I responded again as I did not feel I had received a satisfactory response and asked for the matter to be escalated. I never received a response. I later became aware Molly's account had been deleted by WhatsApp.

Summary & final comments

64. It is impossible to summarise all of our concerns as a family arising out of the suicide, self harm, depression and hopelessness related material we know Molly interacted with. However, there are some key matters which have been particularly troubling to us, and which we are desperate to ensure other children are not subjected to.

65. We have always understood some material being available about troubling feelings or for example depression/anxiety can be beneficial, such as supportive sharing of experiences which is oriented away from negative thinking and instead towards recovery. However, considering all the material we now know Molly interacted with – which, as far as Instagram is concerned, represented the bare minimum of what Molly in fact saw – we are far more concerned that it had a significant detrimental effect on her. We believe that cumulatively and over time, it gave Molly a darker "new normal" where suicide, self harm and hopelessness were commonplace and the world was a more negative place.

66. We are worried that the material affected Molly, and continues to affect other children, in the following ways. Firstly, normalisation; we worry that the fact that Molly saw such dark and distressing material on mainstream platforms alongside all the normal teenage content would have made these harmful behaviours and thoughts seem normal or commonplace. We are worried that the repeated messages containing the same hopelessness, suicide and self harm related content would have had the same effect and some of the material even appears to glamourise suicide and/or self harm (for example, the images or memes with text saying 'suicidal children are just angels wanting to go home').

67. Secondly, encouragement; we are concerned that seeing others self harm and/or references to it encouraged those behaviours for Molly. We are upset not just about the images of cutting and other methods of injury, seen both in pictures and in video

footage, but about the drip-feed of dark, hopeless and depressing thoughts Molly was surrounded with, and how these might have encouraged her to approach life and her sad feelings in a more negative way. As well as this emotional harm, the detailed information found online relating to methods and techniques for self harm and suicide is known to contribute directly to an increased likelihood of an individual who has ideated suicide going on to die by suicide.

68. Thirdly, we are deeply distressed that Molly sought help from influencers online rather than talking to her family or others who could help her in the offline world. We are worried that she felt the only place that understood her was online, and was encouraged to believe that no one else could empathise with what she was going through, thus blocking 'real-life' sources of help. We have seen repeated words and images saying "I'm fine" with very dark thoughts and feelings hidden behind those words, and are worried that this encouraged Molly to keep her feelings to herself while outwardly repeating "I'm fine".

69. Finally, Molly was seeing many memes and images which described suicide as something inevitable or inescapable. We are worried that this type of material changed Molly's mindset over time and influenced her decisions.

70. We accept that it may not be possible to tell whether Molly's depression was caused by what she saw, as depressive and suicidal content was already an established feature of her online world at the beginning of the six-month period in the scope of this inquest. However, we have no doubt in our minds that it was exacerbated, and that she was taken down a much darker path as a result of her experiences online.

71. Unlike accessing her private notes in her bedroom, accessing Molly's online world has been an arduous, distressing and long journey. It was a further shock to us to learn that as Molly's parents we could not easily access her records, and even more to learn that social media companies appear not to be obliged to help Coroners and law enforcement agencies.

72. My family and I are enormously grateful to HM Senior Coroner Walker for the steps he has taken, conducting this thorough investigation into how our adorable 14 year old Molly came to take her own life and we very much hope that meaningful action will follow so that children are not being repeatedly exposed to harmful content on widely used platforms such as Instagram as this would not be tolerated in any sense in the offline world.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court 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: Sam Russell

Date: 31-08-2022

In the North London Coroners Court
In front of HM Senior Coroner Walker

INQUEST TOUCHING ON THE DEATH OF MOLLY RUSSELL

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OF IAN RUSSELL**

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