

Commissioner calls for “crucial” concerted effort to reach victims and survivors

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse Fiona Ryan has told Stormont’s Executive Office Committee a concerted effort needs to be made to reach victims and survivors who are entitled to apply for redress and services.

At the oral evidence session today, Fiona Ryan provided the Committee with an update on the work of her office, which is focused on promoting the interests of victims and survivors who suffered abuse while a child and resident in an institution in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 1995.

The Commissioner paid tribute to the efforts of victims and survivors themselves and representative groups to inform other victims and survivors in Northern Ireland and elsewhere of their entitlements. The Office of the Commissioner has recently launched its second international awareness raising initiative in 12 months in a bid to reach victims and survivors of historical institutional childhood abuse as well as supporting The Executive Office’s campaign.

Commissioner Ryan said:

“I remain concerned as we enter the last year of Redress that there are still victims and survivors of historical institutional child abuse who are unaware or unsure of their entitlements. I have met with victims and survivors living outside of Northern Ireland who have told me that the abuse they suffered as children in institutions was a key reason for leaving Northern Ireland. I have listened to many survivors, each having had different life journeys, for some leaving to escape their trauma but found their trauma travelled with them.

“How many more victims and survivors are out there whom we have yet to reach? We know that even in Northern Ireland there are victims and survivors who remain unaware or unsure of their entitlements. We have little idea of the numbers because of the lack of research in this area. The risk is even higher for those victims and survivors who left.

“I am calling on the government for a concerted ongoing awareness effort to reach out to victims and survivors in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. We need to provide victims and survivors with the information they need to make choices that are right for them. It is an acknowledgement at the very least - Northern Ireland has not forgotten you.”

The Commissioner highlighted that during last year’s household leaflet campaign her Office received 250 calls in three weeks with 1 in 3 calls from individuals sharing that they had been abused as children in other settings.



Commissioner
for Survivors
of Institutional
Childhood Abuse

“I know from victims and survivors the courage it takes to make that first call, to reach out and say ‘This happened to me. This was done to me’. I want to acknowledge the courage of all victims and survivors. As it stands, we do not know the prevalence in the population of child abuse. It is an issue for those of us seeking to reach and support victims of historical institutional childhood abuse have to work with.”

The Commissioner highlighted that as victims and survivors get older, the legacy of their trauma from the abuse they suffered as children intersects with health risks associated with ageing.

“It underlines the need for ongoing services both specialist and general and for these services to be trauma-informed. Victims and survivors have shared with me their concerns about getting older and their very real fears of entering residential care. The absence of research on prevalence makes planning for services and resources far more challenging. My Office will be starting a consultation with victims and survivors on their experiences of services to help us learn more about what the need for services will be in the future.

“For anyone who is unsure about whether they are entitled to support or financial compensation, my team is here to provide general advice and information to help victims and survivors do this. Anyone can contact my office on 028 9054 4985 or email info@cosica-ni.org”.