



THE COMMISSIONER FOR SURVIVORS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHILDHOOD ABUSE

Commissioner Update

21 December 2022

Thank you...

I want to acknowledge and thank all the victims and survivors, both individuals and groups, who have engaged with me and my office over the last year. Throughout this time, victims and survivors have been open and generous in sharing their experiences and views with me, as well as their hopes for change. I am grateful and looking forward to working on behalf of victims and survivors in 2023.

Awareness Campaign

We do not know how many victims and survivors of historical institutional childhood abuse are living in Northern Ireland or in other jurisdictions. We know, however, that 3,191 survivors have applied for redress since the scheme opened in March 2020. Among my office's responsibilities, is a duty to provide general information and advice to anyone considering applying for redress. I remain mindful of the importance of victims and survivors being aware of their entitlements to redress and services so they can make informed choices.

Along with victims and survivors, I have been consistently calling on The Executive Office to undertake a campaign to raise awareness of these entitlements. While it has been disappointing that the government led campaign to raise awareness of the redress scheme has been considerably delayed, I am pleased that this is now planned for the first part of 2023.

My hope is that the campaign will raise awareness not only about the redress scheme but also the work of this office and the Victims and Survivors Service. It is important to ensure that the campaign reaches not only victims and survivors in Northern Ireland but also those living outside this jurisdiction.

Best Practice Guidance for Solicitors

Victims and survivors engage with my office for many reasons but one of the key reasons is to seek general information and advice on applying for redress. They also share their experiences of the redress process. Some victims and survivors have reported a less than satisfactory experience with their solicitors.

I have engaged with the Law Society of Northern Ireland around continuing professional development initiatives for solicitors. I have been in further discussion with the Law Society regarding a best practice guide for solicitors and I welcome the



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exploratory work the Society is undertaking to develop best practice guidance for solicitors representing victims and survivors of historical institutional childhood abuse.

Redress Review

While it is disappointing that the commissioned review of the redress scheme has not yet been published (due to the current absence of government Ministers) we are continuing to engage with other stakeholders with the aim of ensuring that there is progress on any improvements that can be taken forward.

Services

A key duty of my role as Commissioner is to promote the provision and co-ordination of services for victims and survivors and I seek to achieve this both through engagement with the Victims and Survivors Service and my contact with a wide range of universal services which survivors are likely to encounter. Recently this has included meeting with the Royal College of GPs to discuss how doctors and staff in GP practices can support victims and survivors.

My office has also recently engaged with the Housing Executive asking that they take forward a trauma informed approach to ensure survivors have access to safe, sustainable and appropriate housing. We recently made a submission to the Housing Executive which can be found [here](#).

Memorial

I have continued to highlight the importance of government ensuring that the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry's outstanding recommendations, including memorial, are implemented. The recommendation requires the Executive Office to sponsor the initiative and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to commission a memorial "to remind legislators and others of what many children experienced in residential homes." The recommendation states that the Arts Council should invite representatives of those who were abused as children in residential institutions in Northern Ireland to help in the selection of the successful design.

Victims and survivors previously during the Inquiry and when discussing memorial with me, have expressed a variety of views in relation to memorial.

It would be my view that the Inquiry's recommendation be implemented preferably in the context of a wider memorial programme that allows for a range of expressions of memorial. I am engaging with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and The Executive



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Office on the progression of this recommendation and have met with the memorial teams in Australia, Canada and the Republic of Ireland to further understand the potential scope of a memorial programme.

Advisory Panel

I have been continuing to research and develop proposals to establish a forum for discussion and consultation in 2023. It is a vital that we ensure the development of the forum engages with a wide range of victims and survivors to participate and make sure we take a trauma informed approach to this important work. I look forward to keeping you updated on progress.

Final note

As we move into the Christmas and New Year period, I am acutely aware that this can be a particularly difficult time for people and encourage anyone who is finding it difficult to contact organisations that can provide advice and support. Details for organisations can be found below.

I would like to wish you all a safe and peaceful Christmas and to send my very best wishes for the New Year.

Fiona Ryan

Commissioner

Contact details

Our office will be closed for the Christmas holidays from 4.00 pm on Friday, 23rd December and will re-open at 9.00 am on Thursday, 29th December.

We will also be closed on Monday, 2nd January 2023 re-opening at 9.00 am on Tuesday, 3rd January 2023.

Please be aware the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) will be closed week commencing 26th December and reopen on the 29th and 30th December. A health professional will be available on both days should anyone require crisis intervention. Between 26th – 28th December VSS call lines will direct anyone who requires crisis intervention to Lifeline or their GPs.

While we are closed you can leave a message on our answerphone at 028 90 544984 and we will reply to you when we are back in the office. If you or someone you know is in crisis, you can call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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Calls to Lifeline are free to people living in Northern Ireland who are calling from UK landlines and mobiles.

Samaritans can also talk to you at any time of day on 116 123

If anyone is in immediate danger, please call emergency services on 999.