

**In Care Survivors: Development of Acknowledgement and
Accountability Forum for Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual
Abuse**

Summary of Additional Survivor Responses to the Consultation:
February – April 2009

We know from survivors that it can be very difficult for them to make their voices heard. We wanted to make sure that as many survivors as possible could give us their views on the issues raised in the consultation paper. To assist us in achieving this we approached agencies who provide support services to help us gather more survivors' responses.

Four survivor agencies across Scotland helped us with this. We are grateful to them for their support.

In total we received 36 responses : 15 male and 21 female

Age Range : 16 to 60+ years

Survivors abused in care and looked after settings : 19

Summary of Responses

1. Should Scotland adopt an Acknowledgement & Accountability Forum?

The overwhelming response to this question was yes, the Forum should happen.

- **If so, do you think this is a good title, or should it be changed?**
- **If so, what should it be called?**

Most survivors were in favour of the title „Acknowledgement and Accountability Forum“. Some felt it was a bit cumbersome and could perhaps be made less „official sounding“.

2. If you think it should be adopted, what elements would need to be included? These are just a few examples to consider, but we would like to hear your thoughts and ideas.

- **Acknowledgment and apology**
- **Acceptance of accountability from the individual abuser, the organisation where abuse took place, society as a whole**

Survivors emphasised the need to be believed. Most of them felt that some kind of acknowledgement could achieve this. But they didn't agree about who should make the acknowledgement.

Survivors had different views about the benefits of an apology. Some saw it as a meaningless gesture - questioning who would apologise - and what it would achieve. Others did want an apology, but disagreed on where the apology should come from – abusers don't often admit what they have done is wrong.

Most survivors agreed that abusers and organisations that looked after children should be held accountable.

- **Identifying additional ways to safeguard children who are looked after in all care settings**

All survivors agreed that this should be part of the Forum. They recommended more training of teachers and care workers about recognising signs of abuse.

- **Access for survivors to counselling, support and advocacy**

All survivors agreed that this should be a major element of the Forum – stressing that these services must be easy to reach, long term and fully funded to give survivors the help they need.

- **Establishing an historical record as a means to help future generations to understand what really happened to children abused whilst in care**

Most survivors wanted a historical record of what happened to children in care. They believed that such a record could:

- help survivors
- reduce their feelings of isolation
- provide greater understanding of the abuse individuals have suffered
- prevent future abuse
- discourage people from committing abuse

Survivors were not certain about what would be contained in any record and some survivors had reservations about this.

3. If you don't think that this Forum is the way forward, what would you like to see instead (if anything)?

All survivors agreed that the Forum is the way forward. But they did highlight other important issues also:

- it should be made easier for perpetrators to be charged - the legal system needs to be much more supportive to survivors
- the time bar can prevent survivors bringing civil actions
- more training is required for agencies on child sexual abuse

4. We have always emphasised that survivors will play a key part in shaping the Forum. Do you agree with this, and how can we best achieve this?

All survivors agreed that survivors should play a key role in shaping the Forum. They highlighted that the first hand experience of survivors was key to the Forum's success. They also suggested that survivor support agencies should play a key part in shaping any forum.

Survivors suggested online forums, websites, questionnaires and face to face discussions as ways of involving survivors and support organisations.

5. It is also essential we get non - abusing care staff perspectives. How should we go about this?

Survivors highlighted a number of problems with involving non-abusing care staff. What about non-abusing staff who may have been aware of the abuse and did not act? Was it possible to trust these staff? Survivors felt that non-abusing staff could be invited to the Forum or could give information through questionnaires. Non-abusing staff could be given anonymity so that they could then speak honestly in confidence.

6. Other such Forums have involved family members in the process. How do you feel about this, taking into account that not all families have been supportive and safe? Should we involve families at all?

Some survivors said that families should not be involved at all- there was very little outright support for family members' attendance.

Other survivors agreed that family members *could* be involved but stressed that this should only happen at the request of the individual survivor. They felt that families should only be involved in a supporting role. Families should have accepted that the abuse *did* take place before they could become involved in any way.

7. Do you think there should be others involved in shaping the Forum? If so, who?

A range of different people - social and health care workers, police, medical profession, legal experts - were suggested as useful people to be involved in shaping the Forum. Counsellors and representatives of survivor organisations were most often mentioned.

8. Testing out a pilot in one geographical area in Scotland may be an appropriate way to begin. Do you agree with this? If not, what do you think we should do?

Most survivors agreed that a pilot was an appropriate way to begin. A pilot would allow for improvement or modification of plans before any Forum was set up nationally.

Some survivors opposed the idea of a pilot, believing we should look at similar projects carried out in other countries and others felt that the pilot should not be based in one part of Scotland only.

9. Who should lead this Forum and its work and how should they be appointed?

Most survivors stated that the lead of the Forum should be either a survivor, a counsellor or an expert in this field. Other suggestions were: a representative of SurvivorScotland, or having two chairpersons (one of whom is a survivor).

People didn't comment on how the person should be appointed except for one respondent who suggested it should be through open competition.

10. Public awareness and understanding of the past abuse of children in care setting is critical, how do you think we should go about achieving this?

Most survivors wanted a sustained media/advertising campaign. They thought it was very important to remove the taboo surrounding the topic and bring it to the public's attention. This could help stop abuse happening in the future.

Survivors thought we should consider, leaflets, posters, lectures, conferences, training. Media involvement, regular coverage in papers, radio and television, documentaries and storylines in soaps could be a positive way forward.

If you have any other comments or thoughts, please feel free to add.

"I sincerely hope this Forum comes into place as it may give some type of closure to the victim, or at the very least let the victim know an effort was made and others acknowledged their pain and suffering and the detrimental effect the abuse had on the rest of their life. This also lets the victim know society is acknowledging them and being responsible by bringing the abuse out in the open and hopefully aids in getting rid of the stigma the victim feels and attached to them by society. Society hopefully will have a better understanding of sexual and physical abuse and not stigmatise the victim."

"The Forum cannot just be a talking shop that will brush everything under the carpet. It needs to do good and bring closure to those who have been abused."

"Its been a long time coming! In care abuse impacts daily on people's lives and can be a living hell – but for counselling, I don't think I would be here now."