

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

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Statement from Mr Glenn Houston, panel member

Preliminary Hearing, Edinburgh, 31 January 2017

You have heard today from Lady Smith that, since last spring, we have been taking statements from people who have got in touch to tell us about having been abused in care.

We know that there are others who, for their own reasons, do not yet feel ready to provide a formal statement.

That's OK. We understand that it's not easy for individuals to confront upsetting experiences from their past and that it can be difficult, distressing and traumatic to do so.

So, we think it is highly likely there are people who fall within the Inquiry's remit who have yet to come forward.

There may be individuals who have thought long and hard about contacting this Inquiry but, for their own particular reasons, have not yet done so.

I sincerely hope that any who may be considering doing so will take that initial step that will enable them to contribute to this important Inquiry.

There may be individuals who have memories of being themselves abused in care, or of others being abused in care, who have not yet thought about coming forward. I would, equally, hope that they will now not only think about coming forward but also do so.

We know from other inquiries and other sources that abuse of children in institutions has been an international phenomenon.

We know too that the scale of the harm caused to children in some institutions was systemic i.e. it happened frequently, not just to one child but to many, it was sometimes perpetrated by more than one employee and it was sustained because of failures such as poor management oversight and inadequate processes of supervision, investigation and reporting to the relevant authorities.

A key message from today is that if you have experienced abuse in the care system or have evidence to give about what was happening to children in care, we are keen to hear from you.

If you have thought about making contact with this Inquiry, Lady Smith and I would urge you to come forward to add your evidence to what we have been told by all those who have already been in touch with us.

Please be assured that we are considering the evidence of all applicants very carefully and will continue to do so throughout.

Also, I want to assure anyone coming forward to the Inquiry that you will be treated with the utmost courtesy and respect.

We have a responsibility to ensure that every person within our remit who has been affected by abuse in the care system has the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Inquiry.

That is why we are launching a campaign to increase public awareness that the Inquiry is making progress, what its purpose is and how people can get in touch with us.

We have prepared publicity materials to help the communications process.

This information will, we hope, assist individuals and assist relevant organisations to inform people they come into contact with about the Inquiry.

We have created a range of materials to make the information as accessible to as many people as possible.

This includes posters and leaflets, along with information for use on websites and sharing through social media. There are some leaflets available today in the corridor outside this courtroom but if you require copies of materials, please contact the Inquiry team.

We have considered how best to deliver an effective communications campaign at this stage and have decided on some new strategies. For example, we will be implementing an advertising campaign in bus shelters across Scotland this summer.

Before then, very soon you will hear adverts on popular regional radio stations appealing for anyone who was abused as a child in care and members of the public with any relevant information to contact the Inquiry team.

We want people to think about the Inquiry and talk about it and to share that information with anyone who may have been affected by the issues we are investigating.

This coverage across the whole of Scotland will allow us to reach as many people as possible.

We will be mindful too that some people are living outside Scotland and we will be taking steps to reach people living in other countries.

We will be monitoring the impact of the advertising campaign closely.

We will continue to develop the campaign throughout the course of the Inquiry so we can ensure people are equipped with the information they need to get in touch and talk to us about their experiences.

To those of you who are considering making contact with us, we ask that you phone the Inquiry to speak to a member of the witness support team. You can leave a message on our answerphone, or email us with your contact details and we will get back to you promptly; if you want to take matters further, we will arrange to speak to you at a time and place that is right for you.

As I have said, we will listen carefully to all that you want to tell us.

I have every confidence that with the continuing co-operation of all who have evidence to give including, importantly, applicants and the organisations which represent their interests, this Inquiry will fulfil its remit to provide an accurate and comprehensive account of the nature and extent of the abuse of children in care in Scotland (or children whose care was arranged in Scotland), and its effects and, crucially, to make recommendations that will prevent it from happening again.