

# Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

PO Box 24085; Edinburgh EH7 9EA

e-mail: [information@childabuseinquiry.scot](mailto:information@childabuseinquiry.scot)

## **Address by Glenn Houston**

### **Inquiry Call for Evidence, Glasgow, 23 March 2016**

My name is Glenn Houston and I am from Belfast.

I am a registered social worker and have spent the last 35 years working in health and social care in Northern Ireland. I am also a husband, a father, a brother and a son.

In my formative career I worked with children who were in the care of social services, some of whom were looked after in residential settings and others in foster care.

In more recent times, as a Director of Social Work in the Northern Trust, I was accountable to the Trust Board for the responsibilities of being corporate parent for over 300 young people who, for varying reasons, could not live with their parents and were in the care of the State. In my long career in social work I have never held a more important position.

In my current role, as Chief Executive of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) I worked with Kathleen Marshall, the first Children's Commissioner of Scotland, in completing the Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland, published in November 2014.

The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse in the Republic of Ireland, the Ryan Inquiry (2009), the Independent Inquiry into Abuse at Kerelaw Residential School and Secure Unit here in Scotland (2009) and the Inquiries into Kincora Boy's Home in Northern Ireland (1982 and 1984), tell us that institutional care, rather than always offering a safe haven can, instead, be a toxic environment, harmful to the lives of children and young people.

There are too, many highly committed and dedicated individuals caring for children and young people, in similar situations. Without these individuals state and church run institutions and foster placements could not function. We must be mindful therefore, not to judge the motivations of the many by the actions of the few.

We know from bitter experience that children have suffered significant harm at the hands of those who were entrusted with their care and well-being. Sadly this harm is not isolated to a particular group or type of institution. It crosses many divisions and is prevalent in many countries.

Child abuse has always been unacceptable, and nothing can ever excuse, justify or condone why it should have happened in any state or church run institution, or in any other context.

Children have suffered in silence, not knowing who to turn to, or how to end the harms they were being subjected to. Some adults in a position of trust and authority have turned a blind eye, thereby colluding with perpetrators and, in some cases, enabling them to continue harming children.

This Inquiry provides survivors who experienced abuse, whether it be physical, sexual or emotional abuse, with an opportunity to speak out.

It provides a channel to acknowledge the significant impact abuse has had on the lives of those affected and on their families.

An opportunity to expose the harms perpetrated by those who were in a position of trust and authority.

It is a sad indictment of our society that adults entrusted with caring for and protecting children from harm not only failed to honour that obligation, but destroyed the trust and confidence of these children in any authority.

Children who were in situations where they were incapable of placing themselves beyond the reach of harm.

Children who were fearful of speaking out, fearful of being misbelieved or who feared being punished for doing so; and those who did speak out but were not listened to or believed.

I cannot expect to know or fully understand what it is like to have been subjected to systemic abuse by individuals in positions of trust and authority.

But, I do know from reading the testimonies of survivors, that it is an intolerable burden which has caused great pain, distress and sometimes tragedy in the lives of those affected. Many Survivors have carried this burden of guilt and shame throughout their lives, and at great cost to themselves and their families.

The impact is demonstrated from the literature, from available research and from the testimonies of survivors.

The terms of reference for this Inquiry include the requirement to examine how abuse affects survivors in the longer term, and how it, in turn, impacts on their families.

This Inquiry will listen to survivors and will give voice to their experiences.

It is my expectation that, in addressing its remit, this Inquiry will engage survivors, be respectful of them, allowing them the opportunity to recount their experiences, reassured they will be listened to and fully supported in giving their evidence.

I am pleased that the Inquiry is listening and responding to the representations from survivors and is already taking steps to engage with those who need to be heard now, whilst they are able and willing to recount their experiences.

I am honoured to have been appointed to be a member of this Inquiry, to work alongside Professor Lamb, a fellow Panel Member, and with the entire staff team in supporting Susan O'Brien QC, Chair of the Inquiry, in leading this important work.

This is important work, too important to be left undone. I intend giving it my full attention, for as long as is necessary to complete the task.

Please give it yours.

Glenn Houston  
23 March 2016