

I wish to respond to some points raised in evidence before the inquiry.

In her evidence in October 2012, Gill Callister, Secretary of DHS, addressed quality of care issues for children in out of home care. I feel she stated policies that sounded reasonable but I have doubts about implication. I appreciate the focus of the inquiry is the actions of adults in positions of authority but there is a significant level of abuse of residents by other children. This issue was identified by the Ombudsman own motion inquiry into the out of home care of children in 2010. It was recommended in that inquiry that so called child on child abuse concerns be incorporated into the Guidelines of Responding to Quality of Care concern in Out Of Home Care. To my knowledge this has not yet occurred though the recommendation was accepted by DHS.

In her evidence Ms Callister also raises the potential for parents of children to report concerns of safety. I would think this can be a very limited possibility. Many children and young people have limited if any contact with their parents. I regularly hear from residential carers and know it is unusual for parents to be an active presence in the routine of care homes. In my experience residential carers/ DHS also struggle with issues of privacy, and therefore are uncertain what information to share with parents particularly if a matter also involves another child. (Another reason for responding to child on child abuse guidelines to be developed.)

A broader issue of independence was also raised by the Ombudsman in the aforementioned report. He expressed concern about the conflicting roles undertaken by DHS of "customer, regulator and partner of community service organisations ...Current arrangements are not compatible with ensuring a robust system of regulation and quality assurance in out of home care". However the Secretary disagreed and rejected the Ombudsman's recommendation of an independent regulator. I believe it was the only recommendation to be rejected. In the context of the current inquiry I think there are parallels between the criticism of the internal investigatory process of the Catholic Church, in that it is not independent, and the concern raised by the / Ombudsman's report. I would suggest the inquiry consider if the ombudsman's proposal of an independent regulator be reconsidered as a sensible step to promote a culture of safety and transparency in the out of home care sector.

I also wish to make a comment on the evidence of Professor Briggs. I am concerned her research into sex offenders in prison may give the inquiry a distorted picture of the nature of the emergence of sexual abusive behaviour in adolescence or earlier. My understanding is that the recidivism of sexual offending in adolescents is low, as are the relative numbers of adolescents who are abusive in adolescence who continue to act in this way as adults. I think the same applies to victims of sexual abuse who go onto offend. I believe these matters may have been addressed by other witnesses such as Stephen Smallbone and Paul Mullen. It seems to me the group of prisoners she was looking at are likely to be the most serious in terms of sexual offenders, by virtue of the fact they are imprisoned, but are not representative of all victims and /or offenders. I accept the important point she makes as to the multiple experiences of sexual harm as children they experienced may well have influenced their behaviour as adults.

My final observation relates to the individuals who have caused such harm to children within the guise of their religious/carer duties. There is an understandable horror at their behaviours and a demonisation of their character. But as someone not directly impacted by their actions perhaps I can step back and wonder about their own childhood. We share a common humanity. Perhaps if this has not already occurred, the Committee could recommend some investigation be taken into the lives of

these individuals. Lessons may be learned to assist organisations in their selection of candidates for religious life/caretaking. While not condoning their behaviour as adults, such an exploration may reveal experiences that may allow some concern for their own childhood experience. It would not be surprising if at least in some of these individuals there exists harmful childhood experience of a nature not dissimilar to that they have subject others to as adults. Perhaps some sympathy would be permitted of their childhood. We were all children once.

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