

Annual Report

Survivors (North West) 2019-2020

**Charity no. 102882
Date registered. 18/08/2015**

About us: Survivors (North West) is a Support and Advocacy Organisation established to assist Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse who suffered abuse as children while “in care” in residential homes and Institutions in Northern Ireland. The group, representing Victims and Survivors from the North West was originally part of a province wide organisation that was formed in 2009 seeking an Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse. The Northern Ireland Assembly agreed to hold an Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse commencing in 2013. Survivors (North West) became an autonomous organisation with its own constitution in December 2014 and applied for and was granted Charity Status by the Northern Ireland Charity Commission in August 2015. Until funding through the Small Grants Scheme under the then Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) the group had a very small budget raised through voluntary donations from members and supporters.

We now receive an annual funding from The Executive Office of £10,000 per year. We do no other fundraising. This funding is subject to renewal at the discretion of The Executive Office (TEO).

The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Report was released in January 2017. Two years later there has been no action on any of the recommendations contained in that report. This was due to the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive before the report could be reviewed by the First and Deputy First Ministers and approved by Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Survivors (North West) welcomed the findings contained in the Report, however, we felt that the many of the recommendations fell short of meeting the current and future needs of Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse. Early in 2016 we engaged with other interested parties to create proposals that would reflect the needs of Victims and Survivors. These included Rosetta Trust (Belfast) Patrick Corrigan (Amnesty International) Professor

Patricia Lundy (Ulster University) KRW Law (Belfast) Professor Kathleen Mahoney (University of Calgary) and other individual Victims and Survivors collectively “The Panel of Experts on Redress” (POER).

Subsequent to the release of the Historical Institutional Abuse Report the Panel of Experts on Redress, again consulted widely with Victims and Survivors on the way forward and on amending the recommendations contained in the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Report and working with The Executive Office (TEO) discussing effective mechanisms for their delivery.

The collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive days before the release of the Hart Report left decisions on legislation and finance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service and ultimately with David Sterling (HOCS) Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Panel of Experts on Redress met continually to find a way forward and members of the panel have met frequently with The Executive Office and with David Sterling (HOCS). Subsequent to his commitment from a meeting in August 2019, and the approval of the Secretary of State, would draft legislation which would hopefully progress the recommendations in the Historical Institutional Abuse Report through, either a reformed Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, or failing that for action by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at Westminster. It was hoped to see urgent progress by the Autumn of 2018. The collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive due to the resignation of the Deputy First Minister meant that there was no functioning Assembly. We continued to push for substantive discussions to take place on Redress and the rest of the recommendations of the Hart Report. In 2017 we had 2 meetings with James Brokenshire as the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, each time we were told he was powerless in the absence of an Executive to implement the recommendations in the report. That is was a matter best dealt with by a local functioning Assembly and Executive. He was totally resistant when we demanded that the legislation required could be passed by Westminster. The approach was similar from his replacement as Secretary of State who we met with on three occasions. Initially she said Westminster wasn't an option, a view apparently upheld at a Judicial Review into whether she had the power to implement the Recommendations. Eventually after many discussions with The Executive Office

and David Sterling, the Secretary of State agreed that HOCS should proceed to draft legislation with the support of all of the political parties. She responded to the first draft by sending questions to each of the political parties and having got responses to her queries, on the day we were meeting her at Stormont, sending further and requests for clarification to the parties on the details of the proposed legislation. We were in no doubt that The Secretary of State was using the legislation as a tool to get a coalition of the unwilling around one table to reform an Executive. It didn't work, but David Sterling, The Executive Office and political parties had come up with a draft Bill for the implementation of the Hart recommendations. Then a new Secretary of State was appointed in July 2019, Julian Smith was like a breath of fresh air. The earlier Judicial Review finding was reserved and eventually decreed with the "Estoppel Principle" that "there was a failure to act on the legitimate expectation" that Sir Anthony Hart had created when he announced at the launch of the Historical Institutional Abuse Report that he expected the roll out of the recommendations by November 2017. The Secretary of State could take the Legislation to Westminster. After serious and engaged consultation involving The Secretary of State, the Political Parties, the Panel of Experts on Redress, Survivors (North West), Rosetta Trust and Survivors Together and Victims and Survivors, legislation, including the changes that we had insisted be made to the original draft legislation finally made its way to Westminster. Then the Prime Minister, Boris Johnston illegitimately collapsed parliament and it appeared that we would have to wait until a new election before the Historical Institutional Abuse Bill 2019 would see the light of day. A lot more lobbying and meetings with political parties and the Secretary of State, then parliament was recalled by The Speaker, as it had been found to have been illegally shut down. On the last day of the "Boris Johnston" Parliament on the 5th of November 2019 after a powerful and emotional speech by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Julian Smith, the legislation passed unopposed and without amendment. The Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Act became law and received Royal Assent. In consultation with HOCS, TEO, the political Parties, The Panel of Experts on Redress, Rosetta Trust, Survivors Together, Survivors (North West) worked on the application and delivery mechanism for the redress process. The Application Process opened on the 31st of March 2020, 5 months after the legislation was passed and 11 years after the first approach had been made to

The Northern Ireland Assembly to hold an Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse.

Brendan McAllister was appointed as the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse, taking up the role in August 2019. He was appointed by David Sterling (HOCS). His role is to act as an independent voice for Victims and Survivors and to represent victims and survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse and lobby for the implementation of the recommendations from the Hart Inquiry. The group went to Belfast to meet with Brendan shortly after his appointment. The first issue we raised was the consultation on the Legislation that was being prepared.

Report of Activities and Events

The Group meets weekly at the WAVE Trauma Centre and is well attended by members. On any given week between 10 and 20 members can come through the meeting. It is an opportunity to ensure that members are managing alright and to update them on any new developments, information from TEO and other matters. Survivors (North West) at its meeting at the Wave Centre offers an informal drop-in service, conversation, discussion, information and updates on the latest developments for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse. Refreshments are provided.

The staff from Advice NI are an invaluable asset to the group. Their patience and empathy are amazing. Members have remarked on the assistance that they have been given with regard to benefit entitlement and claims. Some even finding that there were benefits that they were entitled to that they didn't even know about. They have also continued to work with some members on family tracing and the search for personal records as these are going to be required as the Redress Process rolls out. They were also helpful when it came to suggestions on the design and format of the application for Redress applications.

The counselling and support provided at the WAVE Centre is also well utilised.

Since the release of the Historical Institutional Abuse Report in January 2017 and increasingly since the Passing of the Historical Institutional Abuse Act in November 2019 there have been many requests for information and advice. These have come from former residents of Institutions now living in the Irish Republic, Britain and further afield. Particularly interesting have been contacts from former Child Migrants in Australia. We continue to have contact with many Victims and Survivors outside of this jurisdiction as the Redress process, which opened on the 2nd of March, moves forward. The plan was that Redress Application forms would be available on-line, but as most of our members did not have access to computers and few had the ability to use one anyway, that hard copies would be available. We were however able to print off copies for members locally and advise them to consult with a solicitor to get them filled in, It will also require a lot of work from staff at WAVE and Advice NI to help retrieve records, birth Certificates and proper Identification Documents for applicants. This was just about to make the process difficult.

On 20th March the Government declared the COVID emergency.

Offices closed down, solicitors could only work by phone appointments, we were inundated with requests about applications, documents, personal files from Victims and Survivors who had waited so long for this to happen.

Our Annual General Meeting was scheduled to take place on Friday 10th April. Unfortunately, COVID struck and all gatherings were cancelled. Our last group meeting took place on 20th March 2020 and the WAVE Centre was closed. After contacting available members, a committee decision was made to retain the committee officers until the next Annual General Meeting.

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| Jon McCourt | Chairperson |
| John Heaney | Secretary |
| Will Lynch | Treasurer |
| Don Brown | Welfare Officer |

Survivors (North West) AGM

WAVE Trauma Centre

25-30 The Diamond Derry

11.00am 10th April 2020

CANCELLED

DUE TO COVID RESTRICTIONS

Over the last few weeks we have been able to distribute Redress Application forms to all of our members locally and to many victims and survivors outside of this jurisdiction including Donegal and England, where we contacted local media and the Irish Centres in major cities. We have made the Executive Office and the Redress Board aware of the difficulties caused by the COVID lockdown and they are sympathetic.

In August we organised an daytrip and overnight stay in Donegal. The day started with breakfast in Creeslough and a bus trip to the Workhouse in Dunfanaghy which many members found interesting. Followed by a boat trip on the lake at Dunlewey and lunch in Dunfanaghy then back for an overnight stay at the Inishowen Gateway. Most of our group are between 60 and 70 years old and many live alone. This is a break from social isolation and gives them the opportunity to relax in a completely different environment.

Because extra funding was made available by The Executive office it was possible to bring a group of 22 members to Dublin for a two night stay which we used for updates and evaluation on the implementation of the HIA Legislation in December and a Christmas meal was provided at Brunswick Superbowl in Derry.

There were meetings in Belfast with The Executive Office, the newly appointed Interim Advocate, Brendan McAllister, the Chairman of the Redress Board Judge Colton and his staff to familiarise ourselves with them and establish a working relationship. We also met with party leaders and their delegates appointed to deal with Historical Institutional Abuse issues, even though there is no functioning

Executive or Assembly, to continue to put pressure on them to ensure that they keep Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse on their agenda.

Public Benefit

The profile of Survivors (North West) has ensured that there is an awareness of Historical Institutional Abuse. It has prompted many discussions and there have been opportunities to discuss it within the community sector. Frequent requests for media interviews offer opportunities for discussion in the public realm. It forms part of public discourse at events on Human Rights, Child Protection and Justice including seminars and conferences. The opportunity of visiting schools and community projects are welcome chances to highlight not only the experience itself but the difficulties that former residents of Institutions have faced in coping not only with a traumatic past but fitting into society as a result of their experiences. Involvement in Survivors (North West) limits social isolation, develops new interests and empowers our members to make better choices. It also offers companionship and support. The services and resources through statutory provision, that are available to assist them, are negligible and professional counselling and practical help is not something that any agency seems willing to prioritise. Waiting lists for counselling seem to grow ever longer and limited to a small number of sessions for each client. That is why the service at the WAVE Centre is invaluable to some of our members. It is hoped that with additional funding more help can be made available outside the current statutory provision. The role of the counsellors at the WAVE Centre is an extremely important stopgap for our members but unfortunately is limited by currently available resources. All of this adds to the greater urgency of seeing the roll out of the Redress Scheme for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse and the delivery of service provision included in the Recommendations of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Report. As well as financial Redress we will hopefully see the development of a bespoke service that will address the needs of Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse in the long term. The personal media and community outreach has gained us vital significant public support and increased understanding on an issue that was for too long buried in the mists of shame and history. As we inform those we meet, we change attitudes not just in communities and individuals but in ourselves. Engagement has led to members taking up other activities and volunteering in community projects.

Jon McCourt
Chairperson

Treasurers Remarks
Survivors (North West)
AGM 2019-2020

Opening balance this year was £770.67. Once again, additional funding from the Executive Office allowed us to have extra spend in the programme which meant we could have a residential in Dublin. We also received funding from The Developing Healthy Cities Initiative but unfortunately because of the lateness of the funding and restrictions on its criteria for use, time did not allow it to be spent so it will be returned to the funder. Once again were glad to see an increased uptake among members in events. Although there has been no change in the situation at Stormont with no Executive or Assembly in place, we continue to press for the implementation of the recommendations from the Hart Report. That means a more determined effort has been made to influence policy makers, MLA's and what seems to have been a revolving door of Secretaries of State, so more meetings in Belfast seem to have become the rule rather than the exception. So travel expenses including the bus for the group to meet with the new Interim Advocate Brendan McAllister have seen an increase from the previous year. At this time there has been no call for applications for funding for this year and with the COVID outbreak and its possible restrictions, we do not know when it will happen. The account balance as of 6th April 2020 is £4506.62, of which £2680 will be returned to The Developing Healthy Cities Initiative as we were unable to spend it in time due to it arriving too late to develop a programme that met its criteria.

In accordance with the decision of the Management Committee at the meeting held on 20th March 2020 Lucinda Dougan has agreed to act as an independent Examiner for our accounts this year. Her Report and the Accounts are attached below.

Will Lynch (Treasurer)