

MACSAS CONFERENCE 2009 – EDINBURGH Saturday 17th October 2009

Summary of Key Note Presentations: Maeve Lewis (Director of One in Four, Ireland)

Introduction

- There was a culture of acceptance within Irish society which allowed the abuse of children to go unchallenged. It was accepted as one of those things when men including priests groped teenage girls. Society colluded in the abuse of children in care, accepting without question that these were 'bad' children who deserved to be treated harshly and deserved being in such places as Artane and Letterfract.
- The Bishop of Cloyne resigned because of his mishandling of child abuse cases in his diocese. An inquiry is due to report on Cloyne in 2010.
- The Ryan Commission of Inquiry report into the systematic abuse of children in care homes run by religious orders was published on 20th May 2009.
- The Dublin Commission of Inquiry is due to be published in the next few weeks. The Bishop of Dublin has warned that the report will be 'shocking' in an attempt to prepare for and therefore minimise the reaction when it is released.

One in Four took its name from a survey which found that 1 in 4 people reported having been sexually abused in childhood. When the organisation was set up in 2003 almost all the survivors had been victims of clergy abuse, now membership reflects that 20% are victims of clergy abuse and the rest are survivors of family abuse, or abuse in school and other parts of society. These wider issues have not been looked at yet so Ireland still has a long way to go.

1 in 4 is involved in every aspect of the cycle of sexual violence; from prevention, legal advice, support and therapy, to programmes for sex offenders. The organisation is engaged in policy formation within the church and Government. They have 17 staff and 8 interns.

- In society there is a fundamental conflict between the will to proclaim that abuse has taken place and the will to deny trauma; it is exactly the same dialectic that is played out in the psychotherapy of Trauma.
- The reality which is so hard to get across is that most sex offenders never come to the attention of the criminal justice system and we must work with that reality.

In addressing the issue of child sexual abuse Ireland has tried two experiments:

- (1) **The Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB)** set up in 2002 and concerned with those who had been in 35 institutions in Ireland. Euro 75 million was given by religious communities to the fund to compensate those who were abused. 170,000 children passed through these institutions. By 2005 there had been 14500 applications for compensation. By May 2009 Euro 1 billion has been paid out in settlements ranging from Euro 63000 to Euro 300000.

The RIRB took as its start point an acceptance that abuse had happened. This got everyone round the standard of proof test and the statute of limitations which would have made claims impossible to bring otherwise. However despite the sums of money so far paid out survivors were left angry and frustrated. They were re-traumatised by the investigation into their claims which took as the start point that abuse did not happen. The congregations denied and challenged all claims of abuse and/or minimised the harm caused or blamed the families of the children for their subsequent difficulties. Survivors

Minster and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS)
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felt that their experiences were not heard and when settlements were made gagging orders were imposed. Survivors felt that their sense of powerlessness was reinforced by the experience.

(2) **Commissions of Inquiry.** To date there have been four commission of inquiry:

- The Ferns Inquiry (2005) into clergy abuse within the diocese of Ferns
- The Ryan Report (2009) into child abuse within institutions run by religious orders such as the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy
- Dublin Archdiocese Inquiry (2009)
- Cloyne Diocese Inquiry (due out in 2010)

These inquiries and the RIRB only came about because of the courage of survivors who refused to remain silent and spoke out forcing Ireland to respond to the overwhelming truth of the systematic abuse of children by the church.

- The Inquiries were modelled along the lines of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.
- Galvanised by a documentary 'Dear Daughter' about the treatment of girls in institutions run by the Sisters of Mercy and "States of Fear" a book by Mary Raftery about child abuse in religious institutions, Ireland was forced to investigate.
- The Ryan Investigations Committee heard sworn evidence from survivors and members of the congregations. This evidence formed the basis of the report. A Confidential Committee was also set up to hear evidence from those who wanted to speak and have their experiences heard but who did not want to be within the main body of the report. This evidence is only generally reflected within the report.
- The number of survivors who wanted to give sworn testimony was so great that in the end 1000 survivors gave evidence and thousands were unable to.
- Several congregations including the Christian Brothers contested the evidence from survivors up to a week before the report was published. The Department of Education refused to cooperate with the Commission, refused to hand over their records or to answer questions put by the commissioners. However some commissioners were very brave and spoke out against those who refused to cooperate.
- In the end the report did not name the alleged abusers, even though a number had already been convicted of child abuse.

The Ryan Report was published in May 2009. The media interest was incredible, the world's media turned up.

- The report documented the systematic sexual, physical and emotional abuse of children over a 70 year period since independence.
- The commission found that overwhelmingly the children had been placed in the institutions because of poverty. Over 90% of the children had come from homes where mothers were married but could not afford to keep the children. Those who did offend committed such 'crimes' as stealing food or truanting from school.
- Evidence came out that the religious orders engaged with the courts to look for children to be placed in their institutions as they would be paid by the state for each child sent to them.

- The Department of Education had been responsible for Annual Inspections of these institutions. The question still being asked is how could the inspectors and the department not know what was happening as it was widespread?

The response of survivors to the Ryan Report was far more positive, even though there was no money. It was about being heard and being believed. Never could their experiences be denied again. The report documented the systematic abuse of children. There was however widespread anger that few or no prosecutions were brought against the perpetrators. The Police did consider some of the cases but there were difficulties which meant prosecution was very unlikely.

There is enormous public anger towards the religious congregations. They are perceived to have wriggled out of responsibility. Attempts are now being made to compel the congregations to make a more substantial contribution to the RIRB. However the largest congregations the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of mercy have placed all their property, schools etc in to trusts which means these assets can not be used to pay compensation.

1 in 4 marched through Dublin in May 2009 after the report was published. On a Wednesday lunchtime more than 15000 people took part and the City came to a standstill and clapped the survivors. It was a healing moment.

However there have been individual disappointments and a number of serious issues remain to be investigated;

- Many children died in these institutions. In Letterfract there are upwards of 50 graves of children and the medical records are very scant. There was clearly collusion between medical personnel and the congregations to cover up the level of hurt caused to children
- The reports so far commissioned excluded other groups of survivors such as the Magdalene women. However these women were not placed into the institutions by the state but rather by their families.

Is it Enough?

Have these Commissions and the RIRB brought about any change in Irish Society towards Children? Irish society was authoritarian and deferential to the church. Many were disempowered and excluded by society because of their class, gender and age. There was a lack of transparency and complicity in the care and abuse of children. There were many silent witnesses to what happened, few spoke out for the children, most of society was drawn into it. We all knew and did nothing. Clergy abuse accounts for only 5% of all child abuse in Ireland, most abuse takes place within the context of the wider society; teachers, families and community members. There has been no reflection yet on why this happened? Are we still the same society that will allow it to happen again?