

Cross-Party Group on Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

14th September 2021 at 1.00 pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Fulton MacGregor, MSP, Convener, Collette Stevenson MSP

Invited guests

None

Non-MSP Group Members

Anne Macdonald, Health & Social Care Adviser, Co Convener, Janine Rennie, Wellbeing Scotland, Co Convener, Sandra Brown, Moira Anderson Foundation, Treasurer, Emma Bryson, Speak Out Survivors, Lynn Burns, Break the Silence, Andrew Campbell, Student, Ellie Forgan, Kingdom Abuse Survivors Project, Alexa Green, Student, Dr Javita Narang, International Consultant, Trauma Care, , Dr Eric Swanepoel, Writer and Researcher, Carol Willson, Student

Apologies

Katy Clark MSP, James Dornan MSP, Pam Hunter, Say Women, Ewan Law, Fife College, Rukhsana Saleem, Moira Anderson Foundation

Agenda item 1

Update on Covid 19 and its effects for survivors and survivor agencies

Sandra and Janine provided a brief update on some aspects on how survivors and survivor agencies are coping, or not under the circumstances of COVID.

Sandra highlighted that additional risks emerged for adult and child survivors during Covid. The Pandemic has fragmented adult and children's lives with little or no safety nets or safe places that they would usually go to. Tragically the Moira Anderson Foundation knows of three adult survivors who took their own lives due to Covid's affects on their mental health.

Wellbeing Scotland have seen a significant increase in referrals since the Covid-19 pandemic. Our referrals have grown from around 30 a week to 30 a day on some days. Our referrals reported in our annual report grew by 60% compared to the previous year. They continue to grow. Survivors of childhood abuse have found the pandemic re-traumatising. For many the feeling of being trapped was terrifying as it was a reminder of childhood. We were aware of some survivors who had no contact with anyone other than their counsellor from week to week. Suicidal ideation has grown significantly but following appropriate support this has reduced substantially.

We are aware that this is the case with many other support providers' statutory and third sector. Statutory partners have waiting lists between 18 months and two years. They have received some additional funding but one of the main issues is that clients are not referred on to non-statutory partners. While they may also have a waiting list they will not be as significant. One of the solutions is to direct clients to online resources.

Clients have reported to us that they are very dissatisfied about this alternative to therapy. Many find it very distressing. There has been a theme from the start of the pandemic for online resources to be publicised. Many of the online resources are CBT based. Survivors of abuse report challenges with CBT, even trauma focussed CBT.

It is vital moving forward that we realise this will be a mental health tsunami of massive proportions with trauma at the root of many cases, particularly childhood sexual abuse. Survivors will be referred to statutory NHS services to sit on a waiting list or be directed online while the impact of trauma on a day-to-day basis is unbearable for them. The trauma training framework is welcomed, and it is hoped that the trauma awareness in generic services will lead to further referrals to specialists. However, this will add to demand for services and the above issues. There has been much recent discussion on drug related deaths. It is recognised that in many cases the root cause of substance misuse is childhood abuse. At the root of suicide in many cases is childhood abuse. We must stop putting a plaster on the issue and instead tackle the root cause. If we fail to do so there will be a significant impact in the longer term. We have to look at early intervention for survivors and appropriate support.

There followed a general discussion on how Covid has and is affecting the lives of survivors and its impact on their health and wellbeing.

It was agreed that Fulton write to Mr Swinney MSP in his capacity as Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Relief requesting a response to our concerns. Anne will collate her notes as well as getting more detail from Sandra and Janine. **Action Anne and Fulton**

Agenda item 2

Update on Redress Scheme

Janine provided a comprehensive and detailed update on the Scheme, most of which was upsetting and disturbing in equal measure.

The Redress scheme now has its Chair Johnny Gwynne and Chief Executive Joanna McCreadie.

Joanna was previously CEO of the Gannochy Trust and Johnny retired Chief Constable. Consultations have taken place with survivors about a survivor's forum and survivors were part of the interview process for the panel. Some survivors after meeting the team decided not to be part of the interview process as they were unhappy at the amount panel members would be paid.

We have heard from other survivor agencies and clients that they are very unhappy about the wording used in the Framework. The Framework aims to capture the escalating levels of harm experienced by children abused in care in Scotland. The levels are illustrated by examples of abusive behaviour informed by factual descriptions given by survivors to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales (IICSA) and other bodies. These are by no means exhaustive but attempt to take into particular account the specific and distinct features relevant to children who are abused in care, as opposed to those abused in other settings (Redress Scotland wording). The framework was reviewed by Clinical Psychologists which is of concern as the paper is not trauma informed and potentially seriously triggering for survivors "We have continued to work with clinical psychologists to develop the Framework taking on board feedback received throughout that process and beyond".

The Scottish Government asked for survivors to consult on branding for Redress Scotland. This was sent to survivors and they were very distressed that their experiences are discussed in terms of branding and also many do not understand the language used. Many feel unable to contribute.

Redress Scotland will not take into account the impact the abuse had on survivors. Rather the payment will be based on experiences in care. The wording is as follows:

“Redress provides tangible recognition of the harm caused and acknowledges that it should never have happened. The redress scheme does not attempt to compensate survivors in the same way that a court would, or to put them into the position they would have been in, had the abuse not happened. We understand that no amount of money, or any other measure, can do that. Redress does not seek to assess the ‘loss’ suffered by survivors in the way that civil courts do. Individuals will not have to establish injury or loss or prove the harm caused by the abuse. Instead, it will be sufficient for applicants to establish that the abuse occurred in an eligible setting.”

The framework gives higher payments for significant sexual abuse. Survivors find it very difficult to speak about sexual abuse even to their counsellors. Often when they come for therapy it is the first time they have told anyone. In training Wellbeing Scotland ask people how distressing it would be to explain to others a sexual experience that is not abuse as a way of highlighting how difficult it is for anyone to discuss sexual matters. For those who have been abused it is often impossible. Many survivors have shut out the abuse or dissociated from it to cope. To bring it to the surface could be dangerous. There is no explanation how this will be evidenced. Sexual abuse has no witnesses in most cases. Many survivors cannot even access records to prove that they were in care. Evidence of assaults does not appear in records. To have looked at the impact as evidence may have provided some way

that survivors could evidence what they have lost. Redress Scotland have accepted that impact could evidence that abuse took place but it would not evidence the type of abuse so it would be difficult to see how that would fit the Framework model. The Framework will not be part of a formal consultation.

Survivors are already very distressed about the waiver where to accept a Redress payment they will have to give up their right to Civil Action. While legal advice will be given many feel they will accept a payment due to financial difficulty and may regret not taking a case forward particularly if others are later successful.

Without this process being managed in a safe trauma informed way there is a real risk that survivors may take their own lives as many have already expressed that possibility. Many have fought for much of their lives for justice and for redress and they feel let down again.

Fulton and Collette suggested the group request a meeting with a representative from the Scottish Government Redress Policy Team. **Action Fulton and Collette**

Agenda item 3

Suggested issues for future discussion and action by the group

- Website: Emma and Alexa
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Andrew
- Not Proven Verdict and Corroboration: Emma
- Trauma Informed Curriculums: Ewan
- Improving the management of sexual offence cases: Anne
- Sexual abuse by children and sexualisation of children: Carol

Due to time constraints we did not have sufficient time to adequately address these points. Anne suggested that she contact the members who raised the points to write up a brief background with information and how they would like the group to proceed. **Action Anne**

Agenda item 4

Any Other Competent Business

Due to unexpected parliament business which has inadvertently meant we have had to cancel or shorten meetings Fulton suggested we might look at a late afternoon/early evening meeting. The group agreed that we should try this approach as in the past we did alternate lunchtimes and evenings. We also agreed that in the future we look at a hybrid model for meetings which would facilitate attendance for those who do not work or live in Edinburgh.

Date of Next Virtual Meeting: Wednesday November 17th 6 pm