

Annual Report 2015 - 2016



**National
Confidential
Forum**

A chance to be heard

“

It helped to bring about a sort of closure for me. I will never forget my abuse in care, but being open and getting it off my chest to experienced listeners helped me to take one step nearer to being satisfied that I have been taken seriously.

”

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of those who chose to come along and share with the Forum their experiences of institutional care.

We have felt humbled by the courage and eloquence of those from whom we have heard. These men and women have shared with us experiences of savagery, neglect and indifference. We have also heard of generous, compassionate and loving care from those working in homes and other settings.

We have heard about lives shaped by those childhoods, those who have been in care and also sometimes their partners, relations, friends and children. Many of those taking part have brought along supporters, sometimes in the hearing itself - friends and family or professional supporters.

It has been a privilege for us at the Forum to hear these voices.

The Forum



Welcome

I started as Head of the Forum in February in succession to Anne Currie. This annual report demonstrates the dedication and commitment of all those who helped bring the Forum into being: Anne Currie, Elizabeth Calder, Stella Everingham, Kay Hampton and Jamie Malcolm; and assisted by Ben Lukins, Laura Kerr, Emma Patterson, Angela Ward, and Leona Irvine.

Each and every person who has spoken to us has something powerful to say. Every one of their experiences is valuable to us. It is our on-going task to listen, to record, to acknowledge.

Dr Rachel Happer
October 2016





Chapter 1

Who we are and what we do

1.1 Who we are

The National Confidential Forum (The Forum) is part of the Scottish Government’s Survivor Scotland Strategy, designed to ensure support for adult survivors of childhood abuse, reduce stigma and improve services. The Forum was established through legislative provisions, in Part 2 of and schedule 1A to the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 (“the 2003 Act”) as amended by the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 (“the 2014 Act”). The Forum is established as a Committee of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland through amendments to the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 by the Victim and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014. The Scottish Government Survivor Scotland Team is the Forum’s sponsor.

1.2 What we do

We provide a means for people who were placed in institutional care in Scotland as children to describe in confidence (give testimony) experiences of that care. We do this by:

- Acknowledging people’s experiences and creating a historical record of their time in institutional care

The Forum is not intended to be an investigative inquiry or a means of apology – these aspects are dealt with by other parts of the Government’s strategy to support survivors of childhood abuse.

1.3 Who can come to the Forum

Any person who lived in a care service or a health service as a child (under 18 years old) in Scotland can share care experiences with the Forum. They must have been living away from home in institutional care: for example in a children's home, a residential school, a hospital ward for children or a boarding school. More information about which institutions are covered by the Forum can be found on our website: www.nationalconfidentialforum.org.uk. Participants must be over 16 and have left the institutional care setting which they wish to talk about.

1.4 Coming to Hearings

The Hearings have become well established, and the Forum has developed a way of listening to people that is focused on providing an environment that attends to individual needs and creates a safe space to share experiences. Our first task is to ensure that the decision to take part is the right one: this can take a number of contacts by email and telephone to agree this; and also when is the best time. This way of acknowledging people's experiences is not the right way for everyone. The Forum support staff work this out with each person who contacts us, identifying what they want to share about their experience and the best way for them to do this, including if they want to bring one or two people along to support them should they attend a hearing. Further support is available from the dedicated Advice and Guidance telephone helpline before and after the Hearing.





Once at the Hearing the choice of what and how much any individual shares is theirs completely. We do not work with a schedule of pre-set questions. Instead, we offer people the time to say what is most important to them. Preparation before the Hearing, having a supporter along, a break in the middle of the Hearing, all may help people share what they want to say in a safe and comfortable manner. We try to care for people in a respectful and sensitive way and show them how important they are to us. Some people have chosen to send us something in writing, and we treat this with the same respect. We ask people what they would like us to reflect in the reports we will write and we will ensure that their voices are effectively heard.

The following vignettes draw on actual experiences of several different people, but are not the account of any one person and may help provide an insight into this.

Jean

Jean was in touch with our support staff off and on for nearly a year before coming to a Hearing. At the start phone calls were long and covered a lot of ground; uncertainty about what the Forum was for and whether we could be trusted. We were not sure whether the Forum was what Jean was looking for and one of our support staff spent a lot of time with her on the phone, sometimes by letter, making sure Jean didn't feel pressured and had all the information and support she needed to make her decision. We also offered help in making contact for some personal support, whether or not she decided to proceed to a Hearing.

When Jean came, with the counsellor we had helped her engage with, she was quite anxious, so we gave her a bit more time to settle into her own space before we invited her and her counsellor into the Hearing room. After a little hesitancy about where to start, we were able to reassure her that many people feel that way. So Jean did start to tell us, about how patchy many of her early memories are, and of how little she has to help her fill the gaps. She has older brothers and a sister but they all had different care experiences, so they can't fill in a lot of details. She told us about an early time when she was with her sister, and spoke with warmth of some memories of that time. She told us of much darker times, when she was profoundly hurt and abused by adults who were meant to be caring for and protecting her. She spoke of fear, of shame, of bewilderment trying to understand what she had done wrong to bring this upon her.

Jean spoke of becoming a parent and living every day until her children were adults in terror that she might fail them and they would end up in care. She was never able to relax her guard because she had not known what it was like to live in a home where people cared about each other - didn't know the difference between a child seeking affection and an adult committing a sexual assault. Now she knows she got it right, that she always had it in her to be loving.

But she still doesn't know how to be loved, and her relationships have been hard because of that. She blames herself for this. Though she looks at her grandchildren and how small they are and wonders how she could have been to blame when she was that same age.





We take a break, it has been so hard and emotional for Jean talking about all this, and she is tiring. After a break, a coffee and a talk with her supporter, we invite Jean back into the Hearing room.

She looks rested and calm. She only speaks for a short time in this second part of her Hearing, and has clearly decided exactly what she wants to say. She says she does not want or need to tell us more about the abuse she suffered, but she would like our help in reporting an episode from her childhood to the Police. But the main thing is, she wanted to come to the Forum because, for her, it's about more than the particularly dreadful thing that someone did to her. It's about the way her whole life, to this day, has been blighted by never having felt that she mattered to or was loved by anyone. Never a cuddle, never a comfort when she was sick. She knows she was really clever at school, it was in a couple of school reports. But no-one was ever interested, and she was just in a state of fear and trying not to be noticed, so her education was lost to her. She wants us to tell of the sheer extent and reach of all that was lost to her in her childhood, and how it affects her every day of her adult life.

Edward

Edward by contrast was clear and certain from first point of contact, knew what the Forum is and isn't, had thought about it carefully - for a long time in fact, but privately, and now that he was here, had prepared what he wanted to say. His family life was difficult. He was placed in care for only a short part of his early childhood. Although separated from his family, his time in one children's home was something that he

believes changed the course of his life. He was very young but remembers feeling safe and lovingly cared for, remembers a house filled with children playing, not screams and swearing. They were all eventually returned to family care, and that he is profoundly sad about because it resumed the misery, neglect and regular low-level abuse. Edward was clear that he was aware through counselling of the impact of the traumatic experiences in his childhood; he did not need or want to share those with Forum. He wanted us to hear him say that a good experience of care can make a profound and lasting difference, and that those working with children in need of care and protection in a way that provides a good care experience need to hear that.

He had experienced a different way of living and he believes that alone is what gave him a family, a route through education and self-esteem to secure work. His family life and relationships were based on gentleness and respect, and he now has a family life with his own children that is completely different from his own childhood, and different from the adult lives of his older siblings.

Edward expressed his thanks for the opportunity to say this, and left quite quickly. It had been a brief, but quietly powerful and emotional hearing.

The two vignettes reflect the range of experiences described and the diverse reasons people choose to come to the Forum. We have become acutely aware that people, who do come to hearings, reach deep into the most private and painful parts of their lives. We owe them the greatest respect and care.



Chapter 2

Key Activities

2.1 Communications and Outreach

2.1.1 Communications Strategy

The Forum engaged the services of Clark Communications to help establish a communications strategy and delivery plan. We used a combination of communication channels and approaches to reach our audiences and to provide as many opportunities for adults who have spent time in care as children to see and hear about our work, providing information on how and why they should get involved. This aspect of our work is crucial, as we want to ensure that the opportunity to attend hearings is made available to as many people as possible.

2.1.2 Target Audience

We have made strenuous efforts to ensure people know about the Forum. We contacted Directors of Social Work and Education, organisations that were responsible for providing institutional care, GPs, CAB, support agencies and a whole variety of large and small care providers. We have made focussed efforts to reach those working in services for people with learning disabilities; care experiences young people; former child migrants; minority ethnic communities; adult survivors of abuse and domestic violence or gender violence.

Newsletters have carried articles about the Forum, and our leaflets have been distributed widely including to GP surgeries, libraries, advice outlets, local authorities and health settings.



2.1.3 Outreach

We have held a number of regional events, had stands at some key conferences and visited many organisations to explain how we work. We undertook a targeted piece of work with the Scottish Prison Service, aware that the prison population includes a disproportionate number of people who have been in care as children. We did this to ensure that prisoners had access to the Forum. Our work with prisoners involved contact with Scottish prisons about how our messages would be communicated to those serving a custodial sentence, including developing specific leaflets and information.

We held a number of regional campaigns to make as many people aware of the Forum's existence as possible and used local press, radio and social media. We had one particular campaign focused on those who had been in school hostels, including advertising in Gaelic. Our website has been frequently visited following our campaigns, and some organisations have provided a link from their site to ours.

We are aware that we need to continue our efforts to ensure that all those who are eligible to come to us are aware of our existence.

2.2 Enquiries

The total number of initial enquiries taken over this year was 159. Those who contacted us were predominantly those who had been in residential care. A smaller number of enquiries were from staff at various support and statutory services. The nature of the enquiries was diverse as reflected in the table below.

| Nature of enquiry | No. of enquiries |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Information seeking | 97 |
| Signposting | 5 |
| Application request | 16 |
| Complaint against NCF | 1 |
| Guidance | 16 |
| Direct application | 3 |
| Other | 21 |

2.3 Time between applications and Hearings

We aim to allow enough time for participants to understand what it means coming to the Forum and that they fully understand our processes. This is a highly individual activity: we found, for example, one individual took over a year from first point of contact to their Hearing; for others it may be a matter of weeks. During this time applicants consider the information provided by support staff, discuss areas that may be unclear to them with Forum support staff, seek out a companion to support them at the hearing, and some take advantage of the pre-Hearing support provided independently of the Forum.

2.4 Hearings

As a result of our communications and outreach activities, 57 individuals shared their experiences of 117 institutions. 18 women and 39 men participated in hearings this year predominantly from within the 51- 60 years age band, followed by the 41-50 years age band. (See table below)

2.4.1 Age and gender profile (n=57; 2 ages not given)

| | Female | Male | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 21-30 | - | 3 | |
| 31-40 | - | 1 | |
| 41-50 | 6 | 8 | |
| 51-60 | 8 | 18 | |
| 61-70 | 2 | 6 | |
| 71-80 | 1 | 1 | |
| 81-90 | 1 | - | |
| Ages not given | - | 2 | |
| Total | 18 | 39 | 57 |

2.4.2 Type of Hearings

Of the 57 hearings, 53 were face to face (4 of these being held in another location) and 4 were written. Twenty seven Participants came with supporters.

2.5. Confidentiality and Disclosures

We take great care to ensure that applicants understand our confidentiality and disclosure policy, including informed verbal consent, how we intend using the information provided in any reports we might write, and the limited circumstances under which we share information. We do this at least three times at different stages - before, during and after hearings. We believe that it is important for participants to be appropriately prepared and know what to expect when they come to hearings.

Sixteen disclosures were made to the Child Abuse Section of Police Scotland, following our joint protocol. The police have worked closely with us to ensure that these disclosures are followed up with the individuals who made them.

2.6. Post – Hearing

After the Hearing, participants are supported by Forum staff in regard to sign-posting and to ensure that they are given information to assist them with accessing services that they may require. To date we have signposted 28 participants after Hearings. This often includes information in relation to counselling services and assistance in finding their care record.

Participants are made aware that they can return to the Forum within 14 days of the Hearing, should they wish to listen to the tape: it is explained that the tape recording will thereafter be destroyed. The information then remains in an anonymous format as testimonies on our database. There were a few occasions where participants sent additional information post Hearing (via email or post).

Participants are informed about our feedback process and are encouraged to take part, as we are keen to hear about areas that could be improved in line with participants' expectations.

Chapter 3

Reflecting on information to date

3.1 Creating a National Record

One of the Forum's key objectives is to create a national record reflecting participants' experiences that will contribute to the legacy of childcare in Scotland.

A number of participants enquired how the information provided will be used and expressed an interest in having access to reports. It is therefore anticipated that initial reports would be produced in an accessible format and with participants being our key audience.

We believe it is important to reflect participants' experiences in ways that accurately convey the very many powerful testimonies we heard. It is anticipated that a special book with at least one quote from each participant will be created to mark their involvement in the Forum. This will be done respectfully, sensitively, and in a way that our duty of confidentiality is not compromised.

3.2 What we heard so far

3.2.1 Experiences

Participants spoke of different and mixed experiences and reflected deeply on their time in care. Motivations for coming to the Forum were varied, ranging from sense of obligation to wanting to ensure that their experiences could be a source of learning for positive childcare experiences in the future. We have heard many accounts of profound loss and abuse. Sometimes even alongside abuse, participants told us of



relationships or experiences, which had a positive impact on their childhood or in their subsequent adult life.

3.2.2 What participants like to see reflected in reports

We do not ask pre-set questions: we simply wish to hear what it is that participants consider most important to be reflected in any public record of their experience in care. Responses were diverse and personal, yet some elements are repeated and we were therefore able to identify certain patterns from our Hearings.

For example, a recurring theme was that participants felt it was important for children to be heard and believed.

Others wanted us to reflect;

- i) the importance of maintaining key relationships while in care
- ii) the need of those who were in care to seek an understanding of their childhood and identity; and
- iii) the importance of love and affection while in care.

3.2.3 Experiences of abuse

We heard of many instances of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Others spoke of harsh discipline, neglect, unkindness and cruelty.

“The punishment handed out by the staff.... were for the most minor and insignificant of things; my hair would be pulled out. I was belted and slapped so hard red marks would be left on my body.”

3.2.4 Impact of abusive experiences

We heard a great deal around the impact of abuse including for example the inability to form meaningful relationships in adult life, to show love or affection, dependency on alcohol or drugs and severe mental illness.



3.2.5 Learning lessons from participants' experiences

A large number of participants indicated that they came to the Forum so that lessons could be learned regarding the nature of childcare now and in the future.

We are currently in the process of analysing the information that participants shared with us and will produce a report on this in due course.

3.3 What participants said about the Forum

3.3.1 Feedback

We received feedback from participants immediately after the Hearing, through emails and letters of thanks, expressing encouragingly positive comments about our processes and conduct of hearings. We also commissioned an independent researcher to conduct an evaluation of our work.

3.3.1.1 On preparing for Hearings

In discussing their experiences of care at the Forum Hearing, most participants agreed that they were able to describe **all or most** (83%) of what they wanted to say. People did acknowledge that it could be emotionally challenging for people to talk about their experiences and express their experience in words. Responses in relation to the support provided by staff were extremely positive. All participants felt that staff were **very good** in explaining what they could expect at Hearings.



3.3.1.2 On Hearings

In general participants agreed or strongly agreed that the Forum members encouraged them to speak freely; dealt sensitively with their feelings and treated them with respect. The vast majority of those who responded stated they would “fairly likely” or “very likely” recommend the Forum.

The best thing about the Hearings for participants is expressed in their words, as follows:

“...allowed me an opportunity to examine and contextualise my experiences and voice them in an environment where they would be heard; a very positive experience...”

“...expressing my past childhood trauma to people who understand and want to make sure that no one else has to undergo the same trauma as myself and putting things in place for the future...”

“...it helped to bring about a sort of closure for me. I will never forget my abuse in care, but being open and getting it off my chest to experienced listeners helped me to take one step nearer to being satisfied that I have been taken seriously...”

3.3.1.3 On what was most difficult for participants

Many participants indicated that prior to coming to the Forum they feared not being believed. Others thought that no one will be interested in what they had to say given the historical nature of their experiences. One participant said:

“...because I was talking about things I have never spoken about; things that had been locked away for over 50 years...”

Many were nevertheless glad they came to the Forum and felt heard:

“...I think it is good to have people pay attention to me and to understand what it was like for me...”



Chapter 4 Looking ahead

The success of the Forum's work to date is demonstrated throughout this annual report. Reaching out to those who experienced institutional care in Scotland remains a major challenge. Nevertheless 85% of those who came to the Forum said they were "fairly likely" or "very likely" to recommend coming to the Forum. The Forum has clearly met a real need since it was established in 2014. We hope that the accounts narrated to Forum members in our safe environment, combined with the care given by Forum support staff to participants as they prepare for a Hearing and leave after a Hearing, not only help us record what happened to them, but also help bring acknowledgement and healing.

Since the creation of the Forum much has changed. The welcome arrival of the Inquiry gives survivors an alternative or additional means to let their voice be heard.

In 2106–17 the Forum will continue to do what it was established to do, take stock of what we have achieved and our role in this new environment.

Later this autumn we intend to publish:

a history of what has been found to date;

an analysis of emerging trends.

We will also explore options for the future role and work of the Forum, in dialogue with all our partners and stakeholders, to help shape the way ahead.

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*The forum provides the place to
off load the burden...to speak
to strangers and walk away*

”









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Forum**

A chance to be heard

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