



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Briefing by Birth Mothers and their Children  
for Justice NI; Truth Recovery NI

24 November 2021

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for The Executive Office

Briefing by Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice NI; Truth Recovery NI

24 November 2021

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Ms Sinead McLaughlin (Chairperson)  
Mr John Stewart (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Pádraig Delargy  
Mrs Diane Dodds  
Mr Alex Easton  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Ms Emma Sheerin

**Witnesses:**

Ms Adele Johnstone	Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice NI
Ms Oonagh McAleer	Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice NI
Mr Eunan Duffy	Truth Recovery NI
Mr Paul McClarey	Truth Recovery NI

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** I welcome to the meeting Eunan Duffy and Paul McClarey, members of Truth Recovery NI; and Adele Johnstone and Oonagh McAleer, who are members of Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice NI.

Before we start the briefing, I thank everyone for coming to give evidence to the Committee and for being so accommodating by doing so at very short notice. After our briefing last week from the panel members, who are the authors of the report on mother-and-baby institutions, the Magdalene laundries and the workhouses in Northern Ireland, it is so important that, right at the heart of the Committee, the voices of victims and survivors — the mothers and babies — are heard.

The Committee was unanimous in its support of the report's five recommendations and 84 sub-recommendations. Recently, when I met victims and survivors, as well as all of you who are at the meeting today, I indicated my commitment to ensuring that we will do all that we can, as a Committee, to emphasise the urgency for the Executive Office to put in place the proper departmental structures, processes and resources, and to do so as soon as physically possible. We need to get truth, justice and accountability, and we need their delivery to be expedited.

Again, thank you so much for coming today. We look forward to hearing your witness statements to the Committee. Who would like to start by giving us a briefing?

**Mr Eunan Duffy (Truth Recovery NI):** I can start, Sinead, if that is OK. It is Eunan Duffy.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** You are very welcome, Eunan.

**Mr Duffy:** Thank you. Can you hear me?

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** I can hear you perfectly, thank you.

**Mr Duffy:** That is good. You will have to bear with me: my printer broke halfway through printing out my presentation, so I will have to read it from the screen.

Good afternoon, everyone. I am a member of Truth Recovery NI. The group was born out of the truth recovery process that started back in January 2021 and the fact that we want to ensure that all the recommendations of the truth recovery report are implemented as fully and as quickly as possible. We are a group of adopted, fostered or boarded-out people and relatives of those affected by the wide-ranging and complex issues of the institutional abuses and crimes that were suffered and are ongoing. We thank the Executive Office Committee for agreeing to listen to and hear the voices of victims and survivors as we do our best to advocate on their behalf.

Article 1 of the 1948 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' says:

*"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."*

That dignity and those rights should be entitlements in life and in death. It is too late for some, who, to this day, are ignored and whose rights are flouted by too many of those in positions of power and influence.

I will give you some context. In November 2016, in the Republic of Ireland, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe made findings and recommendations that were based on previous investigations into institutional crimes and abuses in the Republic of Ireland. That report stated:

*"while the exploration of the historical context is necessary to understand what happened, it should never be used to downplay, justify or condone the said human rights abuses."*

It also stated:

*"the accountability of the state authorities and/or of the religious institutions has not been fully accepted, if at all."*

It went on to say:

*"the redress schemes established are not inclusive enough, notably due to a narrow interpretation of the category of persons who qualify for compensation".*

It then stated:

*"the Commissioner draws the Irish authorities' attention to the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, and the 2011 Council of Europe Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Eradicating Impunity for Serious Human Rights Violations.*

*As for the remedy mechanisms, they should be widely publicised. Time limits for applying should be reasonable so as to leave enough time to become aware of the abuse, overcome psychological and practical barriers, and alleged victims should receive psychological, legal and financial support during the time their claim is being processed."*

Those are just some of his recommendations. He went on to say:

*"In the field of accountability, the Commissioner stresses that effective prosecutions and sanctions are necessary to remove any feeling of impunity and avoid repetition."*

Rewind to 2013. The Northern Ireland Government's scoping exercises for the Northern Ireland Magdalene laundries were incorporated into the same scoping exercises for mother-and-baby institutions in 2014. A report by Dr Sean Lucey in 2014 concluded in less but still substantive detail

that investigations into various crimes and abuses were recommended. He laid out five potential investigative processes identical to those that we were given in January of this year, seven years later. In February 2016, the Northern Ireland Government announced scoping exercises for the exact same institutions. We still do not know what they were, nor their outcomes. In March this year, I sent an FOI request to the Executive Office for disclosure of these scoping exercises, and I have still had no response. The Northern Ireland Government were economical with truth and transparency in 2016, when they did not mention the scoping exercises of three years earlier.

The first chair of the interdepartmental working group never met victims and survivors, despite 14 months of tenure. It took over 15 months to appoint a new chair and 18 months to announce the Government-commissioned research. The Northern Ireland research itself took almost 18 months to publish after it was handed in to the Government. Excuses ranged from no executive summary being required of or handed in by the researchers, legal deliberations and transfer of Department of Health resources and staff. The Maxwellisation process of so-called natural justice to those under charge was instigated, incredibly, one year after the research was delivered. The point is that time is the enemy here. Too much delay, prevarication, procrastination, dismissal and disdain have compounded and prolonged the suffering. Many are deceased, including the perpetrators. Many are lost, missing, including the many enforced disappeared who were not conflict-related and the trafficked persons seemingly recorded as dead. The death and burial records that we have access to are laced with huge anomalies and discrepancies.

From 1945 to 1984, the former Good Shepherd convent in Newry integrated a mother-and-baby unit, a Magdalene laundry and a refuge hostel. Mothers' testimonies tell of no-go areas and baby deaths on graves marked by painted stones. There are no signs of those now. In 2016, the 'Newry Reporter' wrote an article on concerns about this site. The following day, one man rang in anonymously and said that, in the 1960s, he had been an apprentice joiner in the Newry area. He and others were given the job, using a wooden template, of making hundreds of baby coffins, which were sent up to the Marianvale mother-and-baby institution in Newry. We do not know what happened to them. Why would Marianvale in Newry be different from the institutional sites in the Republic? We know of the horrors of Tuam, Bessborough, Sean Ross Abbey etc. Baby and children infant mortality rates were disproportionate to those of the general public and those born within wedlock. In 1926, 1927 and 1928, St Joseph's baby institution recorded the deaths of more than one in two babies. Dying babies were sent to workhouses, and they died within minutes of arrival.

I have a report by a GP who visited Conneywarren children's home in the 1940s. He remarked that two emaciated children of around seven or eight years of age looked like Belsen inmates, referring to the concentration camp. He wrote to the NSPCC about this; it did nothing. The nursed-out babies often had similar fates in a system facilitated by the NSPCC. An NSPCC inspector was better known as "the cruelty man".

A niche in the market, and a market in the niche, was grasped by the institutions and their alliances when, instead of letting babies starve to death, prospective adopters around the world knew that this island, North and South, was the go-to place to secure a baby using eugenics. Wealthy and desperate couples, including the famous, could come to these shores knowing that the system could bypass any existing laws. Babies were saleable, marketable goods — commodities — in a system of capitalist supply and demand. The existing cemetery records of Marianvale show no grave records or memorials pre-1985, despite women passing that cemetery every day as they were force-marched to the chapel.

In 2017, a farcical and token sham search for human remains, which was undertaken by a so-called archaeologist and a colleague whom she commissioned, revealed no sign of unmarked graves or remains. No scientific technology was employed; manual hand-digging of no more than 40 centimetres "proved" that there was nothing to see.

Planned development on the land formerly owned by the Good Shepherd Sisters has taken place, despite valid concerns and objections. Paramilitary death threats were ignored by victims and survivors. The PSNI and the Police Ombudsman dragged their feet on complaints: nothing to see here, apparently. I have death certificates for babies who died at Marianvale in Newry, but their resting places cannot be identified, and they are not recorded in parish or cemetery records. In 2019, the latest development, a Maxol service station, was passed a with minimal caveat for archaeological pre-works. We demand that, as in the Republic of Ireland, lands of all current and former institutions be immediately identified and protected until forensic investigations are carried out to establish that there is no evidence of improper and undignified burials. Councils should possibly undertake that important work.

Milltown cemetery in Belfast has its own area with many questionable and unidentified burials. However, personal testimony states that babies, consecrated and not, from mother-and-baby institutions etc were tossed into the bog swamp like artificial dolls and now lie in their multitudes alongside discarded adults. Some 11,000 bodies is the underestimate of the number who lie there without marked memorials.

Mass graves are not investigated. Private cemetery status needs to be legislatively abolished. It is a licence to inter at will, with no responsibility or recourse, and it prevails in its unacceptability. There is no dignity, no humanity and no right to a proper burial.

Back in 2000, the Catholic Church, knowing what was contained therein, sold part of the bogland to the Ulster Wildlife Trust. The trust soon returned it, given the controversy. The sale was dismissed by the Roman Catholic Church as an administrative error. Members should bear in mind that the discovery and identification of human remains are also part of the elimination process in establishing the fate of the missing and the disappeared.

The Northern Ireland research published in January this year found no evidence of drug and vaccine trials that were so prominent in the Republic of Ireland. I requested information about myself from GlaxoSmithKline, the pharmaceutical company that commissioned most, if not all, trials, North and South, from the 1930s onwards. It told me that it was unlikely that I was subjected to vaccine trials, because, although they occurred, they were not published. Draw your own conclusions. I have evidence that some trials — quadruple and quintuple vaccine polio trials — occurred here between 1965 and 1967. These issues cannot wait for a statutory inquiry. They have impacted on people's health. We know that many of us were tested after our birth for syphilis, as were our mothers when they were admitted.

Some of us are involved in a current government initiative to review social policy and procedures, and the adoption system is unfit, outdated and detrimental to the varying health aspects of all of us who are blighted by an unacceptable postcode lottery and the serious inconsistency of practice highlighted by systemic misapplication of GDPR rules and regulations. This is another complex, ongoing battle that has huge and immeasurable ramifications for access to information, but, as it stands, it is non-statutory. We need the Northern Ireland Government and their legal eagles to assimilate our findings ASAP, preferably, we hope, in the Adoption and Children Bill. Access to relevant personal and institutional administrative information held by the state, religious and charitable bodies and by private and secular bodies is a prerequisite, not only for the long-denied people affected but for the state investigation, to ensure best and fullest cooperation of testimony.

We will not accept the past and ongoing debacle or the re-traumatising and inhumane methodology and mindset of the historical institutional abuse (HIA). Nor will we accept the commission of investigation into the mother-and-baby homes in the Republic — the Ryan commission — or the farcical Magdalene investigations. Lessons need to be learned, and we hope that the Northern Ireland Government take note. Testimony is frequently the basis for reality and truth telling, as it often conflicts with the official record. We demand credibility, authority, agency and believability. Our evidence is not as damned by the commission's report in the South as it is contaminated or conspiratorial. We do not need it to be, because it is enshrined and reinforced by truth, and no partial configuration of that truth.

We can fill the Assembly Chamber with reams of scientifically and medically researched evidence that emboldens and corroborates our undeniable, complex traumas and multiple health consequences, which have been perpetually suffered from early-life separation. The unthinkable severances that created irreparable grief, loss, abandonment, disassociation, personality disorders, propensity for addictions, self-harm, suicide and much more, as suffered by mother and child, impact trans-generationally and, such is the damage, are often not resolved by reunion. We will not be downtrodden and denigrated by dismissal of in utero, perinatal and postnatal stresses and harms. No repeat of the ROI redress insult will darken these legislative doors.

Anatomical body requests for research and teaching from Queen's University Belfast is another of the many ongoing issues on which we are trying to ascertain whether informed consent was requested and given for deceased bodies to be used for various anatomical purposes. Potentially, that is another huge scandal. I have data on over 1,100 bodies taken or acquired by the workhouse institutions and by one notable mother-and-baby institution that was run by the Salvation Army in Belfast. The disposal and after-use of those remains are under question. Queen's University Belfast has drip-fed me data for the past two years via freedom of information requests.

The recently established PSNI dedicated hotline to look into our issues is also proving highly unsatisfactory. Some complain of calls being redirected to officers' homes and of serious delays in callback. Little faith or confidence exists. We need no more problems. That is yet more inadequate provision in what some now portray as a tokenistic and toothless inquiry. We need victim support services up and running as of yesterday, not tomorrow. The business plan sits under protracted consideration by the Northern Ireland Government as people yearn to turn from being victim-survivors to thrivers and to be the truest forms of our real beings. Sign off on the victim support services, please. The Government are not to treat us belatedly, as they did so many elements of the HIA inquiry's recommendations, which meant that victim support services were implemented for those affected only in December last year, which was too late for too many.

We also respectfully demand an end to negotiations with all those who are culpable. The time has long passed for appealing to the goodwill, the better nature, the morals and conscience of those who for too long have been determined to drag us, kicking and screaming, into submission and demoralise us. Seize their assets. Raid their offices and archives without notice. Remove their charitable status and their tax exemption. Come down hard. The time for that action has long passed.

The state — we, the people — should not pay for the entirety of the reparations. There is little to no healing without justice. Money does not equate to deprivation and denial. These words from Benjamin Franklin apply to all our governors, legislators, political leaders and others:

*"Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."*

We say this to you: use your outrage, use your humanity, listen to your conscience, and be on the right side of history as we make it. Write your best epitaph and legacy for those who come after us and, more importantly, for those still unserved. Thanks very much. I will hand over to Paul.

**Mr Paul McClarey (Truth Recovery NI):** I thank the Committee on my behalf and on behalf of members of Truth Recovery NI and the wider circle of victims and survivors for giving us the opportunity to present evidence today. My name is Paul McClarey, and I am part of a victims and survivors' group called Truth Recovery NI.

I acknowledge the hard work and persistence, over many, many years, of all the campaign groups, particularly Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice NI, whose representatives are here today, and other individuals who, from a place of silence, have brought about this historic and momentous report with all its recommendations, which have been fully endorsed by the Executive. We welcome the announcement that all the recommendations will be implemented in full. The key word is implementation. We accept that some recommendations require legislation, but I urge you to keep the pressure on TEO. The implementation of recommendations that do not require legislation can start immediately.

Although the report is welcome, we also need a fully funded and effective communications strategy to reach out to all those affected. It is imperative that all victims and survivors affected by the scandal know about and know how to engage with the process in full. I would like the Committee to press the Executive for a fully funded communications strategy to reach out to everyone, across all jurisdictions and wherever they may be across the globe. We also welcome the immediate steps that have been taken to establish the consultative forum. It is vital that victims and survivors continue to remain front and centre of the process until the end.

My story is, sadly, like too many others. They are not just stories, however. They are not fiction, and they were not penned by an author for dramatic effect; they are real lived experiences that are filled with unbelievable pain, deep-rooted trauma, feelings of unbearable abandonment, grief and unimaginable heartache. There is no happy ending to these stories, and, collectively, they make up the "greatest scandal of our time".

Page 174 of the journal for the Marianvale mother-and-baby home in Belfast, which was run by the Good Shepherd Sisters, records seven lines. On 1 November 1963, Kathleen Veronica Purcell was admitted when five months' pregnant. The journal states that she was:

*"Sent here by Miss Gorman, Londonderry Welfare."*

She was "sent" there.

The journal continues:

*"Her mother was a prostitute and is now in Muckamore. Kathleen has lived with her Grandmother. She has been working in a factory in Derry since she left school. Putative father, a non Catholic."*

What the seven lines do not mention is that what we really have here is a vulnerable 18-year-old girl whose mother had her out of wedlock; a young girl who was raised by her elderly grandmother; a girl who lived in abject poverty; a girl whose mother, a prostitute, was, at that time, in a mental health hospital; a girl who found herself miles from home. She had been "sent" to Belfast, not Newry, which is where all the other unmarried mums from Derry were sent.

More secrecy on top of secrecy, a complex web of smoke and mirrors, and an 18-year-old on her own, five months' pregnant and carrying her first child. How terrifying was that for her? We hear testimony from mothers who were in those institutions about how they were shamed, told that they were sinners and unfit mothers, made to scrub floors while heavily pregnant, chastised day after day. Effectively, they were brainwashed and convinced, hour after hour, day after day, that they could not give their babies a good life.

The signing of any consent form was a *fait accompli*, and it kicked off a well-oiled, slick operation involving family, Church and state to save the moral fabric of society — to hide the shame. The shame of what? A young girl, unmarried, gets pregnant, and the mother and the baby pay the ultimate price: the primal wound of separation for life.

Where was the help and advice? Did social services throw an arm of comfort around those vulnerable women and tell them that they could keep their babies? Did they tell them that there was another way or that there was help with social welfare, housing etc? No, they did not. They did not offer that blanket of comfort. The only welfare that they were concerned about was keeping the status quo and ensuring that those bastard children were taken from their mothers' arms and given to "better" families.

A later entry on page 174 of the journal states:

*"Baby boy born in City Hospital 28.2.64."*

We know that the baby was baptised and called Martin. The journal continues:

*"Miss Gorman took baby to Derry 9.3.64."*

The baby was nine days old. The adoption files state that Martin was received into the care of the committee — Derry welfare — on 18 March 1964. The consent forms were signed by Kathleen Purcell and dated 7 April.

Let us take that timeline step by step. Miss Gorman took the baby on 9 March. The committee received the child into the care of Derry welfare on 18 March, so where was the baby for nine days? How did the committee take receipt of the child when the consent was not signed until 7 April? At best, it is negligent, but the likelihood, and, in my view, the reality, is much more sinister. I hear the same story from so many babies who are now adults: how, literally days after they were born, they were taken from their mothers.

What was going on here? Did the mothers start to form bonds with their babies? Was there a chance that those mothers might say, "No, I'm keeping my baby"? After all, at a primal level, if you remove any baby animal from its mother, the pain and trauma are evident. Those mothers will die to protect their young. As human beings, are we not more intelligent than animals? Why would that maternal instinct to nurture and protect be any less?

Kathleen's life eventually spiralled out of control. I firmly believe that she never got over having her baby taken away. She became heavily dependent on alcohol — I imagine to numb the pain — and had three more children, none of whom she was able to keep, despite her best efforts. That trauma of separation continued each time. What impact did that have on her mental health?

There is a CID occurrence book in Tennent Street police station that has an entry that was recorded at 2.00 pm on 4 February 1975. An anonymous young male reported that a woman had been burnt at 12 Brookvale Avenue. In attendance at that address, a female was found lying in a blanket with her

clothes burnt and what appeared to be second- and third-degree burns to her body. The details that were recorded were:

*"Kathleen Purcell, no fixed abode".*

She was taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital and died six days later, on 10 February 1975, as a result of those burns. She was 29 years old. She is buried in a Legion of Mary grave in Milltown Cemetery. That was the inevitable tragic end to the tragic life of that young, vulnerable girl, who at 18 years old, entered Marianvale 11 years earlier.

I often visit that grave to put flowers on it. Kathleen Veronica Purcell was my mum. I am her son Martin. I even lost that name, because the family I was boarded out to already had a Martin. That was her favourite saint's name. I became Paul. I was taken away from my mother at nine days old, and I will never see her again. I spent a year in a care home in Derry and was boarded out in March 1965. I was one year old. Later, I was adopted in 1970, aged six.

From my earliest memory, I knew that I did not belong in that place where I was or in the family I was with. That was not because of the colour of my skin: those feelings came long before I was aware of racism and ethnic difference. Something was missing. I felt a bond to someone else. I sensed loss. I felt alone. My adoptive parents told me that they had never seen a baby who cried so much. I have heard the same story from many of the other children, now adults. That feeling of abandonment has shaped my life irreversibly. It never has, and never will, leave me.

We, the children, now adults, cannot let people get in and close. Our defence mechanisms kick in to protect us. We are afraid of being hurt. We are afraid of rejection. We are people-pleasers who always want to be accepted. I lived with a family, but they were the wrong family. I spent nights banging my head off a wall, crying, hoping that my mother would come back for me. As a young boy, I ran away from home. Unprepared, I did not get too far. I could never call my adoptive mother "mum". I simply could not bring myself to say the word to her. On my 18th birthday, I left home. I walked away from that adoptive family and from the brothers and sisters. I asked to be cut out of any will. Whilst I totally acknowledge that many others had great relationships with their adoptive families, for me, I always felt that blood was thicker than water. It is fair to say that I hated my adoptive mother. That was not because she did anything wrong — in fact, many would argue that she gave me shelter and opportunities in life — but, for me, it was much deeper than that: she simply was not my mother. Whatever attachment was made during pregnancy and in those few days when I was with my mum after birth or when she called into the children's home to take me out — whatever happened, words I heard, smiles I saw, gentle stroke I received, or smell I smelled — that small amount of time and contact with my mother has stayed with me all my life.

So when we, the babies, who are now adults, hear of the shameful proposals for redress as announced in the ROI last week, we are shocked, horrified and, frankly, sickened. To say that redress is open only to children who spent more than six months in an institution shows a monumental lack of empathy and compassion. What happened to mothers and children in those institutions was wrong, and rightful redress is long overdue, but the Irish Government totally missed the point; they simply do not get it. They do not understand us or take any account of the scientific and medical research that clearly shows that the earlier the impact of trauma, the longer the effect. We will not accept, in any shape or form, redress proposals like that.

If you accept the notion, which, in my view, you must, that the separation of mother and baby was consent by forced coercion, it was a crime. The length of time spent in an institution cannot form any part of redress provisions. It totally ignores best practice guidelines in neuroscience, childhood trauma and attachment. It is not, and can never be, about a hierarchy of victims or, indeed, a cost-saving exercise.

The children's — now adults' — real family identities are based on scraps of paper stored in a box. We continue lifelong journeys of searching to put the early part of our life's jigsaw together. We cannot answer this simple but serious question about our family medical history: are there any hereditary medical conditions? We do not know the answer and neither do our children.

I received a phone call at lunchtime today from a social worker who is accessing information about my time in the Mourne Drive children's home. The file is massive. She has been working on it for almost three months, and it will take her another two weeks to write a report for me to view. The information about my first year of life has been sitting in a box in a medical records department for 57 years, like so many other people's records. Can you imagine or understand the pain and anguish that that causes

us all? I am sure that, at some stage in your life, all of you who are not affected by this have simply asked your parents, "What was I like as a baby?" It is a simple question, but we cannot have it answered.

Walk a mile in our shoes to understand us. I implore the Committee to take evidence from specialists in childhood trauma, neuroscience and abandonment in order to inform everyone on the issue. We need to change the narrative that it only involves time spent in an institution. People need to understand us. Immediate access to records for those living and deceased — people like me are advocating for ourselves and our deceased mothers — is a key building block in the process. How can we advocate for ourselves and our deceased mothers if we do not know the story?

I started my presentation by using a quote from Phil Scraton to the media when I said that this is the "greatest scandal of our time". Let us work together with passion and determination to deliver truth and justice. Sadly, the report and its implementation will never fully address the pain and trauma that people have suffered. There is nothing that it can do to take away the pain and trauma; it will remain with every one of us, always.

I cannot take my mummy out of that grave in Milltown Cemetery; I cannot hug her; I cannot tell her that I love her. That moment is gone for me forever. When I began the search at 21 years old, she was already dead. I found out my real name and applied for my original birth certificate, which duly arrived in the post. There was no early warning trigger that an adopted child was accessing the records and no social worker to advise me on my journey and about what I might discover. I was solely focused on meeting my mum: the person I had been longing for all my life. I gave no consideration to what I might find out. Needless to say, the discovery of her death and tragic life, other siblings and relatives had a devastating effect on me as a young man. She would have been 40 on the day I went looking for her. We could have had a life together.

Others have reached the pinnacle and found their mother, but, in most cases, it was far, far too late, and rather than having long and enduring relationships with them, they have had a few years at best. Many questions remain unanswered for them, as they do for me. However, full implementation of the report can go some way towards seeing the delivery of truth, justice and redress for the primal wound of a mother being separated from her baby and a baby being separated from their mother. The denial of human rights was a crime inflicted on all involved. We must be creative in our thinking, learn from the mistakes that others have made in the delivery of truth and justice and deliver a world-class truth, justice and redress scheme that other jurisdictions can apply when their time comes, and it will come. They can look at ours and say, "There is a model that truly delivers truth and justice". Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Can I bring Oonagh into the spotlight as well, please?

**Ms Oonagh McAleer (Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice NI):** Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you, Paul and Eunan, for those great speeches. Every word that you said is true. It has left me totally speechless, to be quite honest with you, because I travelled a lot of that road with Eunan over a number of years, and I am witness to everything that he said. There is a lot of evidence that girls from all over Ireland, England and beyond came to Marianvale and the other institutions in Northern Ireland. It is an absolute disgrace.

I, as a living birth mother, went through every bit of suffering and shame that has been spoken about here today. I have been on my journey for 42 years, and it is not over yet. I have suffered mental health issues. I have suffered physical pain and suffering. My story is that I, as a 17-year-old girl, was taken on a journey to a place that I never knew existed. I was placed in an institution in Newry. I was told, "Forget who you are. Put that girl out of your mind. She does not exist any more". I was brought to a small place, like a bedroom, where I was told that I would have to stay. It was actually a dormitory, and it was divided up into sections. There were about 14 girls there in my time. At the bottom of the dormitory where I stayed, there was a small curtain and a small bed, where I lay my head at night. Most of the time, I never slept anyway; I just wondered what was going to happen next. I heard the girls next to me cry all the time; mostly, it was at night. When we heard a nun coming down the corridor, there was total silence. I do not know which was worse: the silence or the crying. That went on for several months while I was in there. It never ended. We went to Mass early in the morning. We sat at the back of the chapel. Our food was very limited, so our protein for carrying our babies was very little. We lost a lot of weight. We worked. We cleaned, as the boys said. We did all those things. Most of all, we were made to knit and sew and make up boxes for our babies. They were boxes of little things like toys and clothes, like cardigans. We thought that we were going to have our babies. We were misled. We were told lies.

When my time came to have my baby, they opened me up and cut him out of me. I had a section, which I never knew I would have. That wound is a memory that I carry every day. I look in the mirror and see what they told me: "You are a sinner. You are no good. No one wants you. Your family does not want you. You are worthless". I have not forgotten those words for the whole of my life. They do nothing but bring you down and destroy you totally. Sometimes, I take a brain freeze because I do not know what direction to go in life other than the way I have come and what I have been through. That is all that I can see. It is like tunnel vision.

My family has been affected by me. It has a ripple effect, and it just does not stop with me. It goes on to my children and my children's children — my grandchildren. I pray that it will end some day. I am absolutely delighted that the recommendations are there. We fought for this day. As I said, I have been on this journey for a very long time. In 2013, I first made myself known to the Government. I left a little letter up the other day; some of you might have seen it. Because of my age, I went through the HIA inquiry, but, unfortunately, I did not get to Banbridge. If I had, it may have made a difference — for other people too.

We met Simon Hamilton when he was Minister of Health, and the Department of Health was going to carry out a scoping exercise. That was in 2015. Michelle O'Neill took over as Minister of Health in October 2016. The Ministers told us that they had agreed to a scoping exercise. We met Peter McBride. We did not meet Norah Gibbons. I am sorry about her death. We met and worked with Judith Gillespie, and we now have the truth recovery design panel. What more can I do? What more can we do to get our final justice? Northern Ireland should feel shame. We are your people, and we expect the Government to do their duty by us.

Our human rights were taken from us. We had the right to freedom of speech and the right to freedom from torture and inhumane treatment, but we still carry that inhumane treatment with us. It has not ended, and our babies are still being treated the same way. We are begging for you today, as the Government, to take that on board, listen to us and appreciate us for who we are: human beings. Take every word of what everybody here has said today because every word of it is the truth, and all we want is justice. Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you, Oonagh. Can I ask Adele Johnstone to come into the spotlight on StarLeaf, please?

**Ms Adele Johnstone (Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice NI):** Good afternoon, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all today.

I want to paint you a picture. I was born in 1951 to a single mother, who resided in the Mater Dei hostel in Belfast. I was adopted in 1953 by an older couple with three children of their own. I do home checks for dog rescues all over Ireland to ensure that a dog is placed in a secure, safe and loving environment, but I was placed with that family without even that check being done. I have a birth certificate and an adoption certificate, but I have no information for the time in between. No one can tell me where I was during the most crucial time for child development. My adoptive parents fed, clothed and educated me, but they did not give me the love and support that a child needs to flourish and grow.

My adoptive mother constantly told me that I was "unadoptable" and that my mother was a prostitute. She was also rather fond of corporal punishment. I was a very lonely, unloved child, and, at 10 years old, I fell prey to a paedophile, who abused me until, at puberty, I became too old. After that, my perceptions of love and sex became very confused, and I fell pregnant at 17 by a young man who really did not care at all what happened to me.

When my adoptive mother found out, she made arrangements with the parish priest that I should go Marianvale. I was not consulted about that decision, and I did not have a clue where my adoptive mother and the priest were taking me. I even thought that I might be killed and thrown in a ditch, such was my terror. I entered Marianvale at age 18, and I spent seven months there. On arrival, I was informed that I could no longer use my name, and I was given the name Bernadette. That was my third name in my short life. Before I was taken to the building where I was going to live, a nun took down the details and gave me forms to sign. I assume now that they were forms to claim benefits; I do not really know.

The long building that was Marianvale was a cold, regimented place, hidden away at the back of the main house. Every second of our lives there was closely observed. We went to chapel in the morning, ate a meagre breakfast and started our chores. We scrubbed floors, washed windows, washed clothes

and bedding and hung them outside on lines. Occasionally, we were allowed to walk around the grounds, but we were always supervised. I remember once walking on the main road, two by two. One of my most vivid memories was that we were told to put on a show for the nuns at the main house. I and others had to do Irish dancing for their entertainment. We were pregnant girls, dancing a jig like performing monkeys. Our showers did not have any doors or curtains, so privacy was non-existent, as we were watched even there. We slept in a dormitory with thin, rough sheets and a blanket, listening to the other girls crying themselves to sleep. We were afforded the most basic healthcare, with no prenatal advice or information. I had high blood pressure, so I was moved to a side room at my adoptive parents' expense.

Before we attended the hospital, we were told to purchase a wedding ring. Mine came from Woolworths. It fooled no one. In the evening, we were allowed to sit in a common room, where we knitted or crocheted small toys and garments for the children we would never keep. From the day we entered that place, we were told that we were unfit to look after a child and that the children would go to parents who would look after them much better than we would. We were also told that we must atone for our sins, and we had to go to confession regularly to confess to the visiting priest. A drip, drip, drip of shame was heaped upon us daily.

When it came time for my child to be born, I was induced and left in a delivery suite on my own, frightened out of my wits. I do not wish to go into every detail of my labour, suffice to say that I needed a lot of stitches. That was done in a rough, uncaring way. I remained in hospital for four days and returned to Marianvale with my child. Before long, I was back to the dormitory and back to chores.

We were given very little advice or guidance on childcare, and we picked it up from each other, sometimes teaching each other things that were not good for a healthy, tiny baby; for example, shaking to get the wind up. I still have nightmares about that. We were allowed into the nursery to feed and change our babies for about 15 to 20 minutes, and we had to follow a strict routine of feeding. The only time we could spend a little longer with them was at the night-time feeds, because the nuns would not get up at night.

Eventually, I was told that an adoption had been arranged, but it fell through, and I was sent to clean the large detached house next door. I think my maternity allowance had run out at that stage, and I had to earn my and my son's keep. It was hard work, and the people used to leave coins all over the place. Maybe they thought that I would steal them, but I used to put them into neat little piles and place them back.

The time came that another adoption was arranged, and I was told the night before, so I found some paper and a pencil. I wrote a little note to my child, telling him that I loved him but that I had no choice but to surrender him. I hid it at the bottom of a bag that was filled with the things that I had made for him and a small toy that I had managed to buy on one of my hospital visits. The next morning, I went to the nursery, dressed my child, wrapped him in a shawl, walked up the corridor and handed him to a nun. She turned her back on me and walked away. I did not see my child for 40 years.

I packed up my meagre belongings and left Marianvale the same day. I returned to my adoptive parents, but I did not stay long. I went to another place to try to pick up my life, and that was when I changed my name for the final time. My name is Adele.

I eventually married and had two more children, but I never forgot my firstborn. I have lived a life of lies, shame and gut-wrenching pain and of never being able to fill that huge hole inside me. I know now that I was deeply traumatised by the events throughout my life, and it is only now that I have been reunited with my son and have sought counselling that I am healing.

I joined Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice about 10 years ago and worked very much in the background, but, gradually, I found my voice. We have been on a really long, hard journey, but now, finally, we have been acknowledged by the truth recovery design panel. We need the recommendations of the truth recovery design panel to be fully implemented as soon as possible. Everything that can be put in place without legislation needs to be done now. Funding for the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) needs to be signed off, as we are hearing from our members of the extensive physical and mental health issues that they are suffering. They require access to counselling and other support services urgently.

Our members have been punished for being pregnant out of wedlock. Our children have suffered separation from us and have feelings of abandonment and of always being different. We all carry the twin badges of shame and stigma. We speak for a large group of victims and survivors, including

many who are too traumatised to appear on our Facebook pages or have their voices heard. We require safeguarding for those victims and survivors as we move on with the process. We need legislation to lead to our statutory inquiry before very long. The Victims and Survivors Forum needs to be established with an independent chairperson as soon as possible so that we can all work together. We were extremely concerned about the lack of communication, and that there was no go-to person for information and updates. We heard that that has been addressed, so we need to be in contact with that person immediately. The truth recovery design panel stated that the independent panel should be set up within six months. We want the process to establish that to be put in motion immediately.

The length of time that women and children spent in those institutions should have no bearing on redress. Some babies were removed from hospital immediately after birth. Redress should never have any impact on benefits or tax liability. We really want an early interim payment to be paid without delay, as many of our members are in advanced years and have multiple health issues. In the event of the death of the victim and survivor, we would like redress to go to their next of kin. Funding is also required to enable all victims and survivors to seek and obtain legal advice and representation in any court or investigation. There must be no age restriction on any girl who entered those institutions, and all institutions must be included. Children who were fostered, boarded out or placed in a children's home must also be included. In addition, we need the Governments on both sides of the border, and from further afield, to cooperate with reference to the trafficking of women and children across multiple jurisdictions.

We need full access to victims and survivors' records immediately, without putting them through hoops. We need access to information so that we can participate fully in any further investigations. We need the legislation relating to the preservation of all relevant records to be drafted immediately. It should cover state and non-state institutions, and officials, agencies, representatives and professionals who facilitated those institutions. Social workers need to review their code of conduct. We have had many instances of people using GDPR in an improper way. They need to stop treating us like children. We are not children; we are adults. The investigation of the whereabouts of missing children and women must also be looked at, as must death records.

Last night, I read all 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The institutions and their facilitators violated practically every one of them.

Thank you for your time, everyone. If you have any questions, we will endeavour to answer them.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you, Eunan, Paul, Oonagh and Adele. That was a very powerful and emotional testimony and witness. It is Ireland's shame. The chair of the expert panel said that it is the "greatest scandal of our time". He is absolutely right. However, we are running out of time. We have to address those issues with urgency. You have given us a very powerful insight, and a very powerful motivation for us to do this job and do it right.

The deputy First Minister stated that the Government have accepted the five recommendation and all the sub-recommendations. That is a really powerful step forward, because they now have to move on to the delivery of those recommendations. The recommendations are unique in the context of truth and recovery, because they are integrated. This is an integrated system where you can have an independent expert panel seeking truth and information in parallel with a statutory public inquiry. We do not, therefore, have to wait on the legislative process but can move forward with urgency to start delivering on truth, justice and accountability. There should be no hiding places for any institution or person who has done those deeds to mothers or babies in this state, North or South. There should be no way for them to hide their financial resources in relation to redress, either.

We have not covered ourselves in glory when dealing with institutional abuse in Northern Ireland in the past. We have been slow; we, too, have dragged our feet. We have work to do, and we can learn from our failures in relation to historical institutional abuse. They have been waiting for an apology from the Executive for almost five years, so the Committee has to ensure that there is due process and scrutiny. We have to ensure that the Department puts together a framework and a delivery plan to deliver the stated recommendations. You deserve no less from a state that has failed you.

I am sorry; I am really emotional about this. Forgive me. I just hope that each one of you who delivered your testimony has family behind you who can give you the hug that I would love to give you today. You deserve that.

I will hand over to John Stewart to ask some questions. Open up the questions, please, John.

**Mr Stewart:** Thank you, Sinead. It is deeply emotional, and I want to echo your words to the witnesses. Thank you so much — all four of you — for your courage and for the dedication that you have shown through your campaigning and your dedication to this cause over many years. Thank you for the work that you have done. I have met all of you over the past couple of days and weeks and have been taken aback by how long you have been campaigning on this issue and helping others with it. It is a credit to each of you.

I want to go into a number of aspects before opening to the floor. I am conscious of other people's time, so I do not want to speak for too long. When you were speaking at the end, Adele, you talked about the need for communication. We always hear about a victim-centred process, but, when it comes to the detail, nobody really knows what that term means. It is the sort of term that we throw around. I think, and I hope that you agree, that communication is key to that. I am interested to hear how you think that should manifest itself. Is there a need for all victims to subscribe to a newsletter to get regular updates, should campaign groups be fed information on a daily basis from, for example, the forum, or should it be a cocktail of everything? What is the key to keeping people informed and for ensuring openness and transparency to make sure that all victims, stakeholders and others who are involved are completely up to date with the information and the processes that are under way?

**Ms Johnstone:** I think that a cocktail of all those would work very well. A newsletter could be sent out to all the email addresses or even to the group to be passed on to the members. A go-to person could be assigned. I think that that has already been addressed. If we have a query, are worried about something, or are not happy about something, we could contact that one person without going all round the houses to try to find somebody. I hope that that answers your question.

**Mr Stewart:** It absolutely does. Folks, does anybody else have an input in relation to that process? Eunan or Paul?

**Mr McClarey:** *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]*

**Mr Stewart:** I do not know whether you are on mute or whether it is us.

**Mr McClarey:** Is it me? Am I speaking now? It is hard to know. Can you hear me?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mr McClarey:** There are two issues. We need to have a full list of every institution that is going to be involved, and we are not clear about that at this stage. If we, as victims and survivors across the various groups, identify places that we believe should be included, we need to be able to advocate for that case.

There needs to be a fully funded communications strategy to reach out to people in the first instance to let them know what work is being done and how they can engage with that. I think that in the Republic of Ireland, letters were sent to every household so that people were not getting a personally addressed letter, and other things were done.

I understand that when the truth recovery design panel — Phil, Maeve and Deirdre — did their work, up to 500 people engaged. Yes, there was a digital platform, and there might have been a box of posters that arrived at some stage and that a few people threw up. Digital platforms are great for young people. A lot of people here are of an older generation, and we have to reach a global audience. The key thing is to tell people what is happening to get them to engage in the process.

**Mr Stewart:** That is a point that we hear time and time again. You all mentioned that many victims have been brave enough to come forward, particularly through the work of representative bodies and campaigning groups to support them through this. Many have not been able to come forward, for whatever reason. Is there an indication of how many people could have been affected by those institutions, whether birth mothers or their children? Is there a figure or rough estimate of that at this stage?

**Mr Duffy:** It is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge how many people are affected here. We have to remember that the access that Northern Ireland researchers had to records was a snapshot. There was a limited number of institutions, and they had limited access to the records that are officially being kept. We do not know how many records they had access to because they had to sign a number of

non-disclosure agreements. They said that 10,500 women went through mother-and-baby institutions and about 3,000 through the laundries. That does not include the workhouses, and you are talking about potentially tens of thousands of people there from 1922 until they closed in 1948.

The problem is that no matter how many records and files you get to see, they are official records and are inaccurate. You will never get a proper account of how many people are affected. We saw records where adopted people and birth mothers were not recorded, whether in baptism registers or in parish registries, yet we know for an absolute fact that they were in those institutions.

That is part of the reason why we need the Victims and Survivors Service. We have asked for DNA testing to be provided by the state. Some people are not even aware of their circumstances, whether they were adopted, fostered, boarded out or whatever the case may be. Unfortunately, DNA will be the only way that some of those people will get an attachment or reunion of some kind. The unfortunate thing is that because of all the illegality and falsifying of certificates etc, people like yourselves could be affected by those institutions and not know it. Even if you have seen a birth certificate, it does not mean that it is genuine and legitimate. It could have been falsified or forged, such was the extent of the criminality and falsifying of records here. Unfortunately, about only 500 people came forward.

To add to what Paul said, unfortunately, no process yet, North or South, has done enough to reach out to people across different jurisdictions and countries. That minimises the number of people who will not only know about the ongoing processes but will be able to apply to the redress schemes. The cynics amongst us would say that that was a deliberate, contrived government strategy to minimise costs to the public purse. The point is that people like us are reaching out to those people. People have found out by accident, sometimes from social media. They have said, "I didn't know this was happening". I know so many people who should have applied to the redress schemes in the South of Ireland but who did not, because they forgot that what happens in the South and what happens in the North affects both jurisdictions, as well as a wider geographical area. It is imperative that the Government do their utmost to reach out across the nations. It has to be intergovernmental, with people talking to the Governments of both states and putting out those newsletters etc. You cannot single out or exclude anybody.

Paul is absolutely right: the commission in the South, before it delivered its report, was cold-calling a lot of people who had given their testimonies. By cold-calling them, it was jeopardising their private, personal and confidential status. It was cold-calling them at home to ask them whether they wanted to anonymise their testimonies to the commission. Cold-calling was carried out by the Northern Ireland researchers up here as well. They were given a list of names, and people did not know that they were going to be called. Again, that potentially jeopardised their circumstances.

**Mr Stewart:** I made that point about data sharing last week. I think that some of you tuned in for that meeting. It is essential that there be data sharing between the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland Governments to make sure that that is not missed. Oonagh, do you want to come in on that? I see your hand up.

**Ms McAleer:** Yes, I want to come in there. There are also migrant children in America, Canada and beyond who, as Eunan said, do not even know that they are adopted; they were taken from their mothers at birth and the mothers told that the children were dead. As I say, we are looking for graves, but we do not even know who is in those graves. We know of one grave in Upper Killeavy that is 16 feet by 8 feet. There are three token gestures on it. The Good Shepherd convent is on it. That is witness to the fact that the grave belongs to it. However, we do not know what is in that grave. We have been told by an ex-priest, who is the caretaker of the graveyard, that he has no record of who is in the grave. That is ridiculous. We are your people, and we need these things opened up. We have seen records on girls from all over Ireland and, as I said, migrant women and children. Girls were told to leave the mother-and-baby homes; they were given a couple of pounds and told to go away. They were shipped off to England or further afield and told, "Be quiet. Live the rest of your life in silence", and that is what most of them did.

**Mr Stewart:** What happened was absolutely horrific and dreadful. I am fully supportive of that. I would like to think that I speak for everyone on the Committee — in fact, I am sure that I do, and they will probably say this — when I say that no stone can be left unturned in the quest for information. Every possible avenue must be opened in the pursuit of truth, and every institution involved must be held to full account.

Folks, I could ask you questions all day — I will probably contact you directly with more questions — but I am conscious of time and the fact that other members want to come in. Thank you very much again for coming along today and for everything that you continue to do. You have my complete support. My door is always open, so feel free to call or get in touch anytime. I will hand back to the Chair, because she can bring in other members. I cannot do that without being the host. Thank you very much.

**Mr Duffy:** Thanks very much, John.

**Ms McAleer:** Thank you.

**Mr McClarey:** Thanks.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** John, thank you for jumping in there. I got a bit overwhelmed with it all, to be honest. You raised a really good point, which Paul and Eunan raised as well, about the unmarked graves. It is about how we secure those graves and their contents to find the information required for the truth recovery design panel as well. Time is running out for that. In my constituency, there have been planning requests to build housing in areas where we suspect that there are babies' remains. There were mother-and-baby homes close by, and the land was originally in the ownership of the Good Shepherd convent. Time is of the essence, and a great deal has to be done.

**Ms Sheerin:** At the outset, I thank all the witnesses for their presentations today. You could not listen to that without being moved. Thank you for the work that you have done on your own behalf, on behalf of your relatives, and of everyone impacted. The Chair said that it is Ireland's shame. There is absolutely no doubt about that. We have a history in this country of religious orders imposing misogyny, secrecy and shame and, plainly, breaching human rights. That is what it amounted to. Thank you for your testimony. We are listening to you.

From a Sinn Féin perspective, TEO has already outlined that it will implement the panel's recommendations. We received a presentation from the members of the truth recovery design panel last week, and we asked about the learnings that they had taken from the mistakes made by the Dublin Government. My party colleague Kathleen Funchion has tabled a motion in the Twenty-six Counties about some of the issues with their scheme, particularly the six-month time criterion and how offensive it is, the fact that it is not trauma-informed and that it does not recognise that, regardless of whether a person spent only a day in one of those institutions, it had knock-on implications for them and for everybody belonging to them.

I assure you that my party and I want to listen to what you are saying, take the recommendations on board and ensure that everything that we do is victim-centred and in line with what you recommended. If we are to right the wrongs of the past and ensure that those things are consigned fully to history, we need proper truth recovery and to listen to the experiences of those who were impacted.

I thank you for sharing, and I send my solidarity to you all. Thank you.

**Ms Johnstone:** Thank you, Emma.

**Mr Duffy:** Thanks, Emma.

**Mr Lunn:** Had I been asked to speak 20 minutes ago, I am afraid that I would have been absolutely speechless. I have been up here for 15 years, and I have never heard such powerful testimony on any subject. I obviously knew about a lot of it, but hearing it from those who were affected is really the only way to understand, or try to understand, what happened.

A number of years ago, we had a debate about the Bon Secours home in Tuam. Barry McElduff, who has gone from here now, tabled that debate. It was emotional enough, but I have never heard anything like what you folk told us today, even having been aware of some of it. I can see the effect that it has had on other members, and I am not one bit surprised.

I have no questions for you, but I hope that we can play our part and do what we can in a meaningful way to bring those issues forward, to try to accelerate the process that hopefully has now begun, and to take on board all the suggestions that you made — all four of you.

I can only say thank you. I feel ashamed and inadequate today, and I just hope that we can remedy some of it. Thank you for your attendance.

**Ms McAleer:** Thank you

**Ms Johnstone:** Thank you.

**Mr Duffy:** Thanks, Trevor.

**Mr McClarey:** Thanks.

**Mrs Dodds:** Like other members of the Committee, I give you my sincere thanks. I think that it was members of the truth recovery design panel last week who said that this is such a shameful and terrible part of the history of this place. Your testimony and your stories today reflect that.

This is a scrutiny Committee for the Executive Office, which is the Department that has taken on the role of implementing the recommendations of the inquiry. So, it will be up to the members of the Committee to scrutinise and make sure that the implementation of the inquiry recommendations is done faithfully, done well and as speedily as possible. Therefore, our role is to scrutinise, and every one of us on the Committee will, with renewed vigour, continue to scrutinise the actions of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister and how they get this thing going.

You mentioned a couple of things that are really important. One is that whichever recommendations do not need legislation should probably get going as quickly as possible. There are no wins in this situation, but we can alleviate some pain by getting some of the recommendations implemented as quickly as possible. Chair, we might ask the Executive Office whether there is an intention to get some of the recommendations that do not need legislation implemented as quickly as possible. That is very important.

You talked about data sharing and unnamed and unmarked graves. I have met some of the people who have been doing the research into that, and it is harrowing to hear their stories.

We need to keep up the communication. The Chair knows that that is an important issue. I would really like the Committee to keep up communication so that we hear from you on whether you feel that the recommendations are being implemented in a way that works for you, is sympathetic to you and is sensitive to the issues that you have expressed today. Above all, thank you.

**Mr McClarey:** Thank you.

**Ms McAleer:** Thank you.

**Mr Duffy:** Thank you.

**Ms Johnstone:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you, Diane, for that. Finally, Pádraig; over to you.

**Mr Delargy:** Thank you for your bravery in telling us your experiences. As Trevor said, it is so hard to put into words what we want to do and what we will do to help you. I am thinking particularly about co-design and making sure that your input is first and foremost, because your voices are the most important in making sure that the process is done right. Implementing the recommendations will not take away the pain, the hurt, the trauma or the loss that you have suffered, but, hopefully, it will be a positive step in ensuring that history does not forget the harm that those institutions have done to women, girls and children.

I was in communication with Linda Dillon during the meeting because she is doing work in this area, and I wanted to clarify a few things. Linda is working on an amendment to the Adoption and Children Bill to criminalise institutions that destroy records and to oblige them to preserve records. I was aware that she had been working on it, and Kathleen Funchion is working on that in the South.

Again, I want to thank you. Paul and Oonagh, what you said about it being not just about yourselves but your families definitely jumped out at me and has stuck with me: the trans-generational impact. We

want to make sure that the insult of what happened in the South will not happen here. We will work with and take our lead from you. Thanks again for coming in.

**Ms McAleer:** Thank you.

**Mr McClarey:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** I will close now by once again thanking all four of you. You gave powerful testament about the atrocities that have scarred your lives and those of your families and your grandchildren. As you say, inter-generational pain has occurred. I give you my commitment on behalf of the Committee that we will do our job in due process. We will scrutinise the work of the Executive Office and push it to act with the urgency and in the time that you require for the fulfilment of the recommendations.

There are areas that I would expect the Executive Office to be working on now. It needs to work on structure and resources and to appoint the significant lead people in the Department and perhaps even a subdivision of the Department. These are complex issues, and many aspects may require a cross-departmental response. We need to know who the lead person is and what forms of communication will be set up so that you are not communicated to but communicated with. We do not want to revisit the poor communication that we have had with the victims of historical institutional abuse, because that has been poor at best, and we do not want to see it repeated.

The Executive Office needs to make some very important first moves. Officials from the Department will brief the Committee in January. We hope that, by then, we will have some form of framework and structure, and communication processes that will give you confidence that we are moving towards delivering the recommendations.

From the bottom of my heart, and for all the victims who are at home quietly cheering you on today because you are telling their story as well as your own, I thank you. Now it is over to us and to the Executive Office to make sure that we do you justice and that your truth is told.

**Mr McClarey:** Thank you, Sinead.

**Ms McAleer:** Thank you.

**Mr Duffy:** Thank you, Sinead, and everybody.

**Ms Johnstone:** Thank you very much.