



Truth Recovery Independent Panel Seeking the Truth

Guidance On Written Testimony

We invite anyone who prefers not to offer oral recorded testimony to submit their testimony in writing. Observations and reflections you offer on the institutions, and the pathways and practices associated with them, will be of great value to the work of the Independent Panel.

The Panel understand that making a written testimony can be traumatic as it requires you to reflect on your personal experiences and how these have affected your life. We know that for some people this may be the first time they have disclosed sensitive and/or upsetting information. We understand this can be highly challenging and cause great upset. We also know that writing about your experiences can cause you to feel traumatised even if you have spoken about them previously. With this in mind, you might want to consider sitting down to write your testimony over a number of days or weeks and to take breaks between those writing sessions. You might also want to consider contacting the support services that are available to you through the Victim Survivors Service, Wave and Adopt NI. More information about these can be found here –

[Emotional Support for Victims and Survivors of Mother & Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundry Institutions - Victims and Survivors Service \(victimsservice.org\)](https://victimsservice.org)

Your written testimony is your way of telling the Independent Panel about your lived experiences of the institutions and the pathways and practices associated with them and the impact on your life and the lives of any of your

family members, whether that be physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, financially, or in any other way.

The decision to make a written testimony is entirely a matter for you. While the Independent Panel Testimony Team is here to assist you to make as informed a decision as possible, your experiences and reflections are unique to you. It will be your testimony in your own words. You are in full control and we will never encourage or dissuade you in what you choose to tell us or how you say it.

What tasks have been set for the Independent Panel?

The Terms of Reference of the Independent Panel were set out in the *Truth Recovery Design Report* that was published in October 2021. The recommendations of the *Truth Recovery Design Report* were accepted by The Executive in November 2021. The Truth Recovery Independent Panel has been directed to:

- Record testimony through a non-adversarial, disability-aware and trauma-sensitive process, ensuring informed choice in giving testimonies (confidential/ in public; oral/ written) and how testimonies are used (e.g. restricted to the Independent Panel/ forwarded to the Inquiry/preserved in a permanent independent archive).
- Investigate and publish findings regarding harms and human rights violations experienced by individuals and families in Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, Workhouses and their pathways and practices (including the adoption system, related institutions such as 'baby homes and private nursing homes, and cross-border and international transfers of children and women).

What should I include in my Written Testimony?

You can decide what is relevant to your personal testimony. If we need to, we can always come back to you for more information or clarity on what you have

told us. What we offer here are guidelines. We are happy to discuss them and answer your questions about your own plans for testimony. Simply email the testimony team and one of us will have a conversation with you by phone or online via Zoom. Our email is testimony@independentpanel.org.uk

You may find it helpful to structure your written testimony into different sections. The different sections will depend on your personal experience (or that of a family member or loved one). For example, writing your testimony so that it begins with your childhood and ends with where you are today might be more manageable as it allows you to create a timeline of events in chronological order. However, you may prefer a different structure. You might want to start with today and work backwards. That is absolutely fine.

If your Testimony includes your recollection of lived experience of an institution:

Some people find it useful to start by explaining their life before they entered an institution. In this case, it is useful to include the name of the institution, and if you know them, the exact (or approximate) dates of your entry and departure from the institution. It will be useful to explain what you know about how you came to be in the institution. What individuals or organisations were involved in the process of your entry (if you know this)?

It is also helpful to include descriptions of what life was like in the institution. You may wish to describe what daily life was like for you from the time you got up until you went to bed each day. What contact(s) did you have with people and places outside the institution (e.g. with family members or other loved ones, via radio, television or newspapers, or via other visitors to the institutions such as doctors, health visitors, social workers etc.). You may want to reference specific incidents you recall in your written testimony and provide details of what happened, who was involved and your feelings at that time (and now).

It would be helpful if you can tell us about leaving the institution and your reflections about this. What happened and how you did you feel when you left? Where did you go after leaving the institution?

You can tell us about any impact that being in an institution had on you or your family. Impact can be from the period where you entered an institution right up to the present day. This may involve how you were treated and any physical, financial, emotional or psychological impact that you want to comment upon. For example, if you were in a mother and baby institution what discussions took place about the options for your baby's future? Who discussed these options with you? What choices were you offered and by whom?

Another example might be if you were in a Magdalene Laundry (these were the three St Mary's Homes operated by the Good Shepherd Sisters in Belfast, Derry and Newry) or the Salvation Army Industrial Home in Belfast. How did you come to enter? What work, if any, did you carry out while you were there? Under what circumstances did you leave? Where did you go to live after you left? A further example involves the role of pre-1948 Workhouses as places where women gave birth after which their baby was adopted, fostered or taken into the care system.

You can tell us about your relationships with family members and friends – have they been impacted by the time you spent in one (or more) of the institutions? How? Did you tell family and friends that you had been in one of the institutions? You can also tell us why you did or did not tell others about your experience in the institution(s).

You may find it helpful to describe your life after you left the institution. You can also let us know if you received any form of support to help you after you left the institution and if that support was helpful to you or not.

If you have significant records from the time you spent in an institution, you can submit these and/or refer to them in your testimony. Records might relate

to your own individual experience (related to your entry to the institution, time in the institution, departure from the institution). Or records about a family member (your birth mother for example) who was associated with how you came to spend time in one of the institutions. You can also describe how you found the experience of accessing your records.

If you are a birth mother and have re-united (or attempted to re-unite) with a child who was placed for adoption, fostering or into a residential institution we invite you to include details of this experience in your written testimony.

If you cannot recall or do not have direct lived experience of the institutions:

Some people may not have memories of the institutions that the Panel is exploring but still have significant testimony to offer. Perhaps because you were a baby at the time that you were there with your birth mother. Or your mother may have given birth to you following an earlier pregnancy during which she was in a mother and baby institution or a pre-1948 Workhouse. Or you may be the partner of a woman who spent time in one of the institutions. Or, as a former partner, you may be a birth father who has been affected indirectly. Or you may be the relative or loved one of a person who spent time in one of the institutions and have been indirectly affected by that.

If you are unable to recall lived experience in an institution for the reasons noted above, the structure of your testimony might be different. For example, you might begin by explaining a childhood that did not involve any knowledge of the institutions, followed by the discovery (in later years) that you were adopted as a child. Alternatively, you might begin by discussing the experience of being fostered or being in a residential home during childhood after you were separated from your birth mother in a mother and baby institution or in the infirmary of a pre-1948 Workhouse.

You might have been affected by the institutions in some other way. You might be the relative or partner of a woman who spent time in a Magdalene

Laundry (the three Good Shepherd St Mary's homes in Belfast, Derry and Newry) or the Salvation Army Industrial Home in Belfast.

You might find it useful to consider including what information you have obtained from your birth mother (or other impacted relative/loved one) about their time in an institution. At what stage in your life were you given this information, what was the nature of the information you received, and who gave it to you? What impact did this have on you?

Did your birth mother (or other impacted relative/loved one) seek access to records related to their time in the institution? What was the outcome of this attempt?

If you have sought access to records related to yourself (perhaps related to adoption, fostering, experience of residential homes) what were the outcomes of those attempts? How did the outcome (and the process of searching) impact upon you and your family?

If you are an individual who has re-united (or attempted to) with family members after the experience of adoption, fostering or being placed in care you might want to include details of this experience in your written testimony.

Can I give the Independent Panel a Written Testimony on behalf of a loved one who has died?

Yes. We know that many family members of a victim/survivor who has sadly died will want to offer testimony on their behalf.

Can I include what redress process I would like to see implemented in my Written Testimony?

Yes. You can include your views on what you would like implemented in the redress process. An example of this could be financial payments, apologies from the State, apologies from the institutions involved, criminal prosecutions for those found to be perpetrators of abuse. It may be that you have other

suggestions in mind, such as a memorial or a form of commemorative art, and the Panel would be keen to learn from your thoughts.

Referenced Definitions:

1. **Institution** - an organisation, establishment, foundation, society, or the like, devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or program, especially one of a public, educational, or charitable character.
2. **Pathways and practices** – The pathways and practices used by the institutions including the adoption system, related institutions such as “baby homes” and private nursing homes and cross border and international transfers of children and women.