



Independent Panel event in Newry,
16 October 2024

Truth Recovery Independent Panel Newsletter

Seeking the Truth

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The Independent Panel Communications and Engagement Working Group are pleased to issue, on behalf of the Panel, the Sept / Oct 2024 edition of our newsletter.

In this edition, we are delighted to share some of the highlights of the Panel's communication and engagement over the last few months. We also want to highlight the Panel's Access to Records Guidance, completed by our Access to Records, Genealogy, Advocacy and Legal Services Working Group, and the next steps for this work.

In our Meet the Panel feature for this edition, we are pleased to introduce you to:

- Dr Patricia Canning, Expert Member in Sociology of Discrimination and Gender-based Violence
- Steven Smyrl, Expert Member in Genealogy

Paul McClarey, Beverley Clarke, Maria Cogley, Steven Smyrl and Sean O'Connell (Communications and Engagement Working Group)

Key Milestones

Below are upcoming key milestones. We will share more details on these milestones with you soon.

November 2024

Distribute posters and flyers to over 300 GP surgeries across NI



November 2024

Hard copy version of Access to Records Guidance available.



Jan - Feb 2024

Distribute posters and flyers to key stakeholders, incl. community networks



November 2024

Press release send to media in North America, Canada and Australia.



January 2024

Second phase of Panel's communication and engagement plan to begin.



Jan - April 2024

Further series of in-person and online engagement events.



Communication and Engagement Highlights

Social Media Activity

On 30th July 2024 the Independent Panel launched social media accounts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter).

With thanks to the Communication and Engagement Working Group, supported by the Panel's Secretariat, both platforms are updated regularly with fresh content keeping our followers updated on our progress and sharing useful information.



We currently have **297 followers on Facebook** and **246 followers on X**.

Almost 30,000 people have seen our Facebook posts. Over 75,000 people have seen our X posts.

Thank you to those who follow our accounts and share our content.



Outreach Events



Drop-in information sessions
Come along to learn more about our work and wider appeal for testimony

The Independent Panel was appointed by The Executive Office to conduct an independent investigation into Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, and Workhouses and their pathways and practices in Northern Ireland from 1922 to 1995. This includes examining the adoption and care systems related to these institutions.

Panel members and testimony facilitators will be available to discuss the testimony process and offer guidance about accessing your records

Drop-in to find out more:

Omagh	Newry
Tuesday, 8 October	Wednesday, 16 October
Silver Birch Hotel	Canal Court Hotel
6:00 PM – 9:30 PM	6:00 PM – 9:30 PM
Belfast	Derry-Londonderry
Tuesday, 22 October	Wednesday, 30 October
Europa Hotel	City Hotel
2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

If you have any questions that you may wish to ask in a more confidential setting, this can be accommodated at the end of the event. Counsellors from the WAVE Trauma centre will be in attendance at each event for those in need of additional support

Visit us for more information:
<https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk>

Testimonies sought in preparation for inquiry into institutional abuse

THE Truth Recovery Independent Panel is asking local people who had direct or indirect contact with Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in the North (1922 – 1995) to come forward and provide testimonies to help inform a future public inquiry.

The ten-person panel is carrying out an independent truth recovery process into the operations of these institutions and their practices. Once this process is complete, the findings – which will largely be based on information contributed by members of the public – will form part of the evidence considered in any prospective public inquiry.

The Truth Recovery Independent Panel said, “Testimony-gathering is an important part of our work. Responding to victim-survivors’ desire to share their lived experiences in a non-adversarial forum, the panel has established a sensitive and carefully designed approach, using specially trained testimony facilitators.

“(We) would like to hear from: Anyone who has been directly impacted by one or more of these institutions and/or their related pathway and practices, including the adoption and care systems; family members of those directly impacted; anyone who has worked, volunteered or lived in close proximity to one of these institutions and can share any relevant information, knowledge or memories about them or their practices.”

If you would like to find out more, the panel will be hosting an information event in Omagh’s Silver Birch Hotel on October 8 from 6pm to 9.30pm.

Victim-survivor representative, Maria Cogley, said, “This is the chance to have what happened to us put on record and for many of us, where choice was part of the problem in our experiences, it is crucial that we are able to give testimony in whatever form we choose whether that is oral or written.

“This is the opportunity for people to tell their story in full, however they like, without being questioned or challenged. So many people are living in the shadow of shame and guilt, and it is not theirs to carry.”

The members of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel.

Throughout October, the Independent Panel held four in-person events across the North / Northern Ireland.

Members of the Independent Panel were in attendance at the drop-in information sessions to talk to people about the testimony process and our new Access to Records Guidance, which was launched on our website last month.

We were privileged to meet many victim-survivors and family members. Thank you for your time and your courage to speak with us.

To raise awareness of our events and encourage as many people as possible to come along to speak with us, we:

- published notifications on our Facebook and X accounts.
- sent a press release to, and placed classified advertisements, in major and regional newspapers.
- had several interviews by our Co-Chairs feature in newspaper articles and on local radio.

A snapshot of our events:



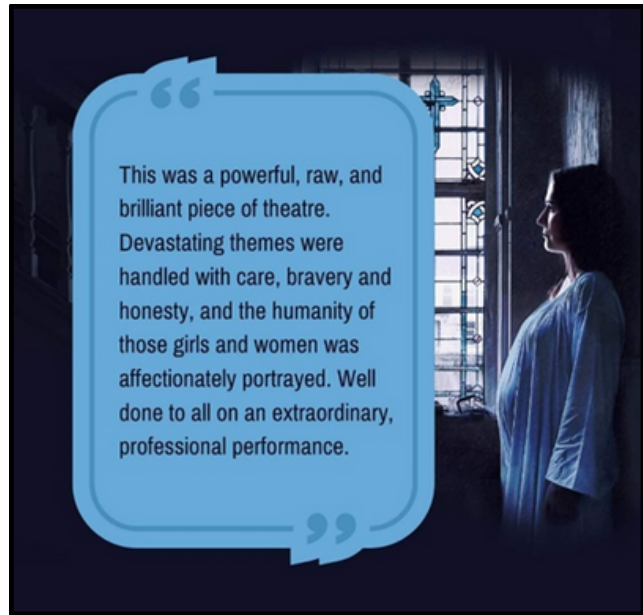
The Marian Hotel



The Independent Panel are honoured that victim-survivor Caitriona Cunningham and Sole Purpose Productions have allowed us to distribute information about our work to those attending performances of The Marian Hotel.

The play is part of a Heritage Project with workshops and oral histories to preserve this history, funded by the National Lottery Heritage fund. Reaching almost 3,000 people over 15 shows during October / November in theatres including Derry, Newry, Letterkenny, Strabane, Armagh and finishing this November in four sold out shows in the Lyric Theatre, Belfast.

Caitriona who has bravely written the play 'The Marian Hotel' was just 19 when she found herself in a Mother and Baby Institution, separated from her newborn daughter. Years later, she's sharing her incredible journey to reunite with her child through this heartfelt and moving performance.



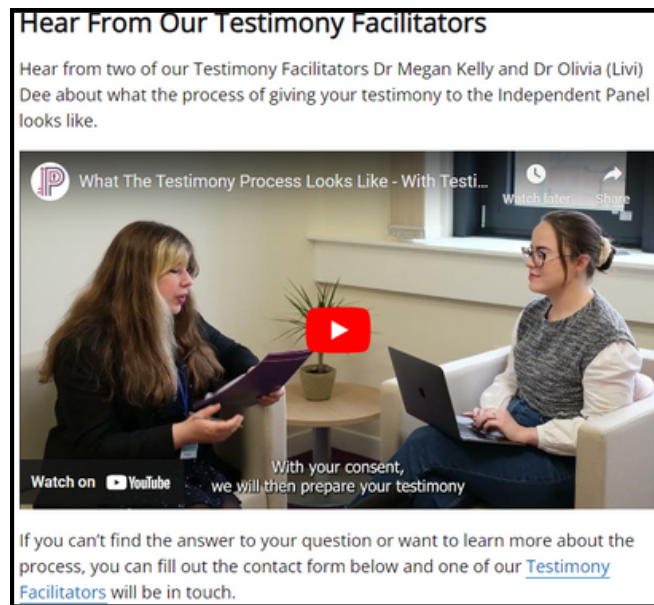
Having already sold-out nights in Derry and Belfast's, The Marian Hotel is a testament to love, resilience, and the determination to overcome unimaginable obstacles.

Caitriona's story is a voice for so many others who endured similar heartbreak and are still seeking truth and justice.

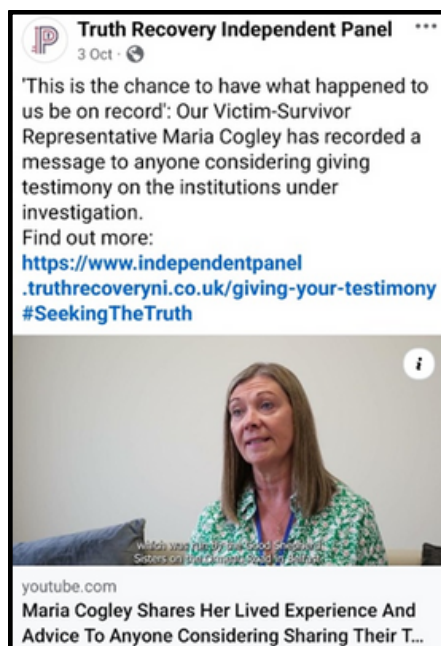
Testimony Videos

The Independent Panel recognises that sharing your lived experience can be a deeply personal and emotional process. In October, we launched several videos to help support you if you are considering giving testimony. These videos explain how we ensure that every lived experience shared with us is treated with care, dignity, and respect.

Two of the Independent Panel's Testimony Facilitators, Dr Megan Kelly and Dr Olivia ('Livi') Dee, walk you through every part of the testimony process in their video, which you can watch on our website by clicking [here](#).

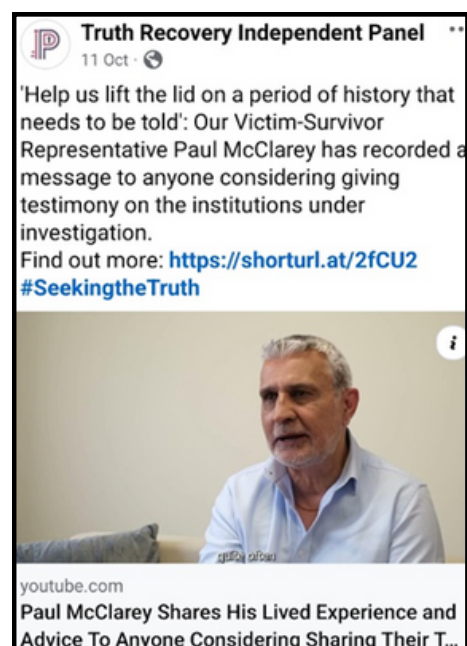


Two of the Independent Panel's Victim-Survivor Representatives, Maria Cogley and Paul McClarey also recorded messages to anyone considering giving testimony.



“ This is the chance to have what happened to us be on record. ”

You can watch Maria's full message [here](#).



“ Help us lift the lid on a period of history that needs to be told. ”

You can watch Paul's full message [here](#).

Further videos will follow, including one from Adele Johnston, Adoptee and Birth Mother.

Press Coverage

Our Co-Chair's Professors Leanne McCormick and Sean O'Connell, have written op-eds (opinion pieces) that have been published by several national newspapers including the Irish News, Belfast Telegraph and the Newsletter. Several regional newspapers also published their pieces in their printed and online versions.

10 NEWS THE IRISH NEWS
WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2024

Panel seeks testimony relating to mother and baby institutions, Magdalene Laundries and workhouses

PLATFORM
TRUTH RECOVERY
INDEPENDENT PANEL

The Truth Recovery Independent Panel is seeking testimonies from survivors of mother and baby institutions, Magdalene Laundries and workhouses. The panel is seeking testimonies from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960. The panel is seeking testimonies from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960. The panel is seeking testimonies from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960.

Individual testimonies will provide invaluable insight into how children were treated and at the adoption process. In 2021, we continue to collect the testimonies of all those affected by these institutions, such as birth mothers, their children, now adults, and other family members of girls and women who were in these institutions. Magdalene Laundries were used to mother and baby institutions. Many more of these affected women and children have been identified in the institutions and the long-term impact of those institutions. Testimony is collected in a safe and sensitive format and there is support available before, during and after the testimony process, for those who are victims or survivors.

Our aim is to create a comprehensive, signed and sealed record of what happened. As a journalist, Sean O'Connell says it is important to hear from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960. The panel is seeking testimonies from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960. The panel is seeking testimonies from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960.

Even those who lived in these homes and workhouses may have feelings that they can offer on what went on inside. A further important group we wish to hear more from are the couples who adopted children from these institutions, as their experiences

the impact that these institutions had on the lives of many people. Many people have since left the region, either due to adoption or other factors, and we need to hear from those who remained in the institutions, such as in Ireland, the UK, or even further afield in places like Australia, Canada, and the US. This is a global story and we want to hear from anyone who has been touched by these homes, regardless of when they were born. We will wish to hear from survivors of religious or sectarian, including priests and nuns, as public often ascribes this issue with those and Catholic-run facilities. Protestant institutions played an equally significant role in the treatment of pregnant women and their children. In fact, greater numbers moved through mother and baby institutions associated with the Protestant churches than was the case for Catholic institutions. We need to hear from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960. The panel is seeking testimonies from survivors of these institutions who were born between 1940 and 1960.

Testimony is collected in a safe and sensitive format and there is support available before, during and after the testimony process, for those who are victims or survivors

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A single observation like this could be an important part of the puzzle when piecing together the broader picture. Similarly, we need to establish what was considered routine in these institutions versus what was abnormal. The importance of every

If you would like to give your testimony or you want to find out more, contact the Truth Recovery Independent Panel by email: independentpanel@trr.co.uk or phoning 028 9651 526.

Leanne and Sean's joint op-ed in The Irish News

Leanne's op-ed in the Newsletter

Leanne McCormick

We need to hear what happened at mother and baby institutions in NI

When I began my research into mother and baby homes and Magdalene Laundries over 20 years ago, there was an assumption that the controversial practices linked to them were primarily happening in the Republic of Ireland.

This perception may have arisen due to the greater visibility of victim and survivor groups in the Republic, many of whom had experienced Catholic-run institutions.

However, the placement of girls and women in these institutions was just as prevalent in Northern Ireland, where it was carried out by Catholic and Protestant as well as state-run organisations.

In fact, more women from Protestant backgrounds passed through mother and baby institutions, so it's crucial that the Truth Recovery Independent Panel gathers testimony from this group to fully understand what took place.

Some people might feel, 'This was just a Catholic issue,' or believe their experience was different from what they've seen in the media. But the research around Protestant-run institutions shows that they were subject to the same control and secrecy as well as the societal shame attached to so-called 'illegitimacy'.

In both Catholic and Protestant institutions, women shared the same experiences of having to work until close to giving birth, of unhelpful staff and of the lonely and isolating experiences of giving birth.

Many women told of the pressure to have their babies adopted and the life-changing impact of this.

Each person's experience is unique, and while some will have had a more difficult time than others, all stories are important. So you might think, 'you won't want to hear from me,' but what we are aiming for is a complete picture, with as many diverse perspectives as possible.

The people who lived through these experiences are the experts of their own lives, and we need their expertise to understand what really happened.

We are also keen to hear from people who might have worked or volunteered in these institutions; who were social workers, probation officers or midwives who came into contact with the women and girls who were in the institutions or their children.

We would also really like to hear from clergy or GPs who might have advised on going to these homes and who can help us understand how they operated.

It is vital we have all sections of the community represented and sharing their experiences and knowledge with us. Our testimony team are very experienced, and support is available at all stages of the confidential process.

The Protestant-run institutions we are investigating include Thornedale House in Belfast, which was operated by the Salvation Army as a mother and baby institution until 1977; Malone Place/Belfast Mission

Maternity Home, which became an NHS maternity home in 1948; Hopetown Hostel in Belfast, which operated from 1943 to 1985; and Kennedy House/Church of Ireland Rescue League in Belfast, which closed in 1955. Additionally, the Salvation Army ran Thornedale Industrial Home in Belfast.

If you would like to give your testimony, or you want to find out more, please contact the Truth Recovery Independent Panel by:

Email: testimony@independentpanel.org.uk
Phone: 028 9651 0263
Or by writing to: Truth Recovery Independent Panel, 4th Floor, Equality House, 7-9 Shaftesbury Square, BT2 7DB

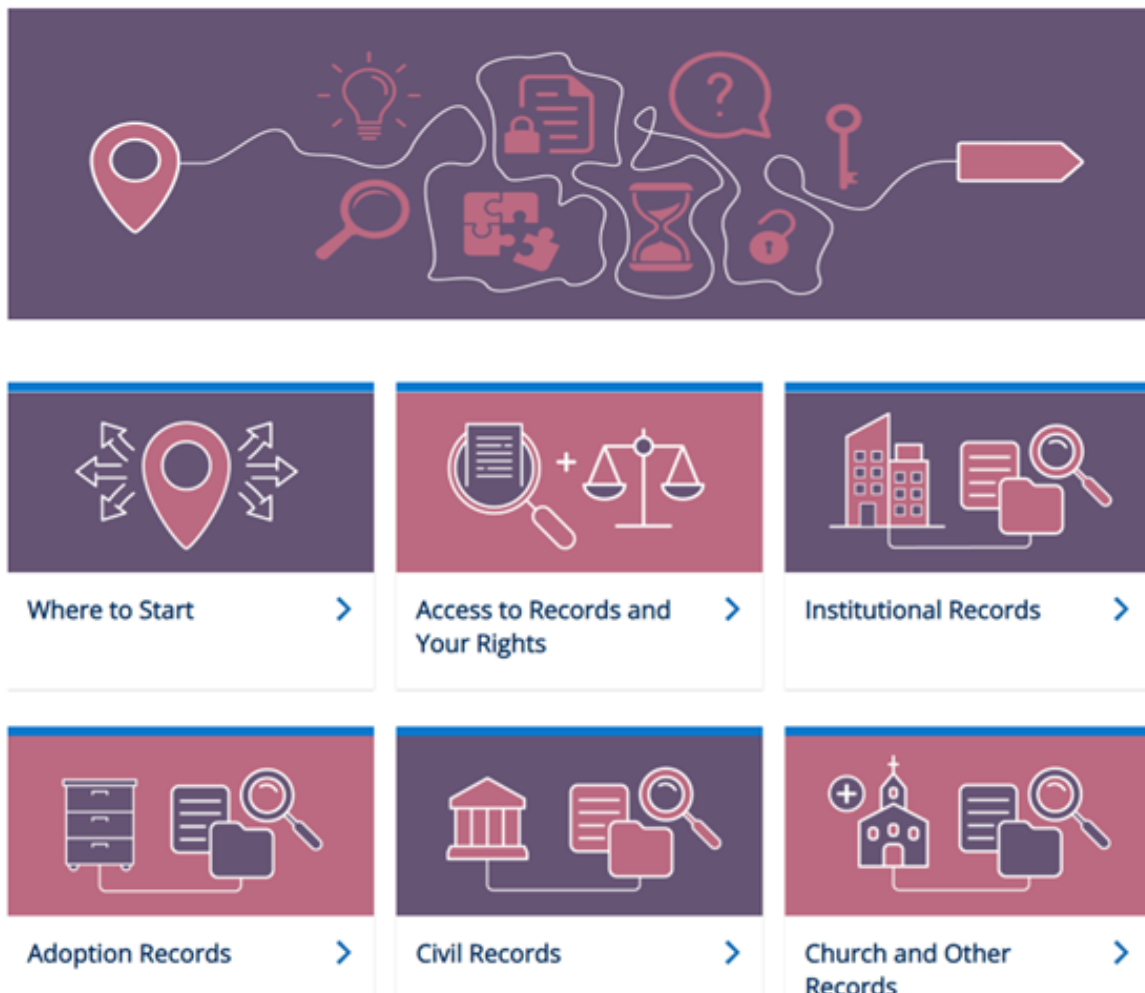
• Professor Leanne McCormick is co-chair of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel

Access to Records Guidance

The Independent Panel's Access to Records, Genealogy, Advocacy and Legal Services Working Group were delighted to publish our Access to Records Guidance and Institutional Information on our website in October.

We have received positive responses from victim-survivors and professional advocates, who are using the guidance to assist in this complex and sensitive journey.

Access to Records



Above is the homepage for the online version of our guidance. Click here to view it: [Access to Records | Independent Panel Truth Recovery NI](https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/access-to-records)

Hard copy versions of our Access to Records Guidance will be available in November. We will provide you with further details about how to request a copy as soon as it is available.

Below is the homepage for our information pages about the institutions. Click here to view it: [The Institutions | Independent Panel Truth Recovery NI](#)

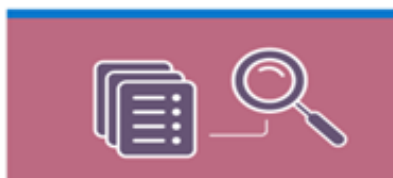
The Institutions



You may find some of the information on this website distressing. If you need to talk to someone, [support is available](#).



Mother and Baby
Institutions/Homes



Magdalene Laundries



Workhouses



Other Institutions



Pathways and Practices



Meet the Panel

Each Panel member brings their own unique skill set, experience, knowledge and expertise to the overall work of the Panel.

Look out for Panel member biographies in future editions of our newsletter. This edition features Dr Patricia Canning and Steve Smyrl.



Dr Patricia Canning

Sociology of Discrimination and Gender-based Violence

Why did you apply to be on the Panel?

I am really motivated by injustice. That may seem like an odd thing to say, but it's the truth. Where there's a 'wrong'. I want to help put it right. I knew that a lot of the evidence in the Panel's work would be linguistic in nature (such as records and personal testimonies) and I wanted to be able to help from this perspective. Having worked abroad for about 8 years I was also glad of the opportunity to do that with people from the different communities that I grew up in.

How do you feel your area of expertise will add value to the work of the IP?

We all have our own specific areas of expertise but we all gel very well together, too, and have a strong sense of the Panel's primary objectives. For that reason, we work separately on our specific focus but come together to fit all the pieces together.

For my part, I am a linguist, which according to a good friend of mine is a type of pasta. What that means for the Panel's work is that I analyse language used in forensic settings (so, a forensic linguist) to improve routes to justice. To give an example of the work I do, I have collected and analysed the testimonies of victims-survivors of domestic abuse to understand what impact (positive and negative) police involvement in their cases has had on them and their relationship with police and the criminal justice system. Thanks to these valuable testimonies I have been able to feed back to police forces to help them identify and work to change 'problem language' (such as victim-blaming language) used when dealing with domestic abuse.

On the Panel, I will analyse the testimonies we are collecting from victims-survivors identifying themes and building a picture of the practices that went on.

What is the importance of hearing testimony from others who worked in or volunteered in these institutions?

Every single testimony is vital. When doing any investigation, it's important to get as many perspectives as possible so that the testimonies collected give a comprehensive picture of what happened. Even if an individual thinks they have nothing to offer the Panel because they didn't know what went on, this itself is helpful for us to know. Please do come and talk with us if you had any connection to any of the institutions or their pathways and practices.

How do testimonies help the Panel uncover pathways and practices?

It's important to note that each person's testimony tells us in detail what happened to them. That is the first way their testimony is valuable. Their personal testimony is valuable for another reason – it helps build a bigger picture of what went on (practices) and how they came to be in (and out of) those institutions being investigated (pathways).

Together, individuals' testimonies give us the most authentic understanding of what happened, how it happened, why it happened, and more. They help us uncover the pathways and practices because they document, for example, a daily routine. That, in itself, helps us to learn what chores were given, how long people were expected to work during the day, whether social time was permitted, what freedom of movement existed, and so on.

Often when an individual speaks about their experience in one of these institutions, they recall other details they had forgotten. This recollection offers an even more detailed account that can help us build a more robust picture of life inside and around the institutions.

Other individuals have spoken about how they were admitted to an institution, who was involved in that process, and whether they felt they had agency in that decision. With every person's testimony, that picture develops like a photograph, growing in depth and scope, and generating a more comprehensive understanding of the pathways and practices more broadly.

What value will the Panel's work bring to victims-survivors from your point of view?

I think this question is best answered by those directly and indirectly affected by what they went through in these institutions or as a result of these institutions. I hope that what we are doing

enables victims-survivors to regain some agency. Whether that is through giving their testimony or informing the process of redress, to have a say in what happens next.

What advice would give to victims-survivors starting their journey to apply for records?

Don't stop asking questions. Be prepared for closed doors. Put your foot in the door. That's probably not helpful information, but I suppose what I mean is that you will encounter challenges and obstructions. It's hard not to be put off by these, but it means you are getting somewhere and barking up the right tree. Keep going. But also, if it gets too much, take a break from it if you are able.

Get help. We have excellent guidance on how to go about this process on our website. Keep a record of who you've contacted and what they gave (or didn't give) you. It will help keep track of your communication.

Why is it important to have the voice of victims-survivors heard in your work?

I remember speaking with a very senior police officer in a police force I won't mention the name of about why there were so many female victims-survivors of domestic abuse withdrawing from the prosecution cases against their perpetrators. I asked him 'why is that?' His answer was lengthy and started with 'I think...' and 'The way I see it...'. When he'd finished, I asked him one question: 'Have you asked them?' He hadn't.

For me, this flouts basic sense. If we want to know what happened and how it was allowed to happen, we need to have the expertise of the right people. That's why we have victim-survivors on the panel and why we have victim-survivors involved in our wider work.

What has your experience of being on the Panel been like so far?

It has been bittersweet. What we are investigating is emotionally raw, challenging, and quite frankly, devastating. At the same time, I have been absolutely astounded by the resilience of those who have given testimony. I have so much admiration for the people whose lives have been impacted by what happened to them.

It has also been lovely working with such genuinely committed people on the Panel. Each panel member is in it with their heart and their soul. As clichéd as it may sound it has been my genuine privilege to work with them all.

Onwards!



Steven Smyrl
Genealogy

Why did you apply to be on the Panel?

I heard that The Executive Office ('TEO') was advertising for an Independent Panel to gather data and testimony about Northern Ireland's Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses, and that the Panel would include an experienced genealogist.

I have over 35 years of experience in utilising records to identify and locate next-of-kin where someone has died intestate (i.e. without known relations). Over the years I have also used those skills to assist many adoptees and their birth parents in facilitating family reunification through research.

I decided to apply as I thought my experience might help make a difference.

How do you feel your area of expertise will add value to the work of the Panel?

The outcome of the Panel's work will be of great importance to

victims-survivors and will ultimately feed into the Statutory Public Inquiry. In everyday practical ways, I see my role playing out in the provision of valuable information that can assist with genealogical research leading, where possible, family reunion.

What is the importance of hearing testimony from others who worked in or volunteered in these institutions?

A well-rounded image is one which is multifaceted. Hearing testimony from those who worked in these institutions or from those who provided services to them allows the Panel to build up a much clearer understanding of how these institutions operated.

How do records help the panel uncover pathways and practices?

To both the Independent Panel and the statutory Public Inquiry which will follow it, it is vital that we can identify and secure as many records as possible created by Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses.

In conjunction with testimony, records can help to underpin personal accounts of trauma, disclosures of various types of abuse, patterns of behaviour, long term questionable policies or financial irregularity.

Why is it crucial that the Panel hears from as many people as possible?

Giving testimony helps build up an important archive of data which cannot be obtained anywhere else. The testimony of individuals is paramount, but each single story helps corroborate the evidence of all others, it helps build up a wider picture. For instance, ten or twenty victims-survivors testifying, independently of each other, about events which are similar in nature provides substance.

What value the Panel's work will bring to victims-survivors from your point of view?

We can see the fruits of the Panel's work already in the form of the groundbreaking guidance we have produced to assist victims-survivors in identifying institutions, accessing records, and providing advice about challenging decisions to deny access to data. All of this can be accessed through our website.

But moreover, because the interests of victims-survivors are of the utmost priority to the Panel, we have taken great care to create a welcoming and empathetic environment to record testimony at our rooms in Equality House.

What advice would give to victims-survivors starting their journey in applying for records?

Please read the guidance notes that the Panel have placed on its website about accessing records. When you start your search, keep clear notes not just of what information you've found, but who you have contacted and when. It's best to apply in writing and then you have a reliable paper trail if at a later stage should you need to appeal a decision.

Why is it important to have the voice of victims-survivors heard in your work?

In my day-to-day work I have to write detailed reports about research to identify the next-of-kin to unclaimed estates. While my reports are all based upon what can be gleaned from written records (birth, marriage & death certificates, wills, census returns, parish registers, voters list etc.). Rarely, if ever, do they not also require me to include oral testimony from family members discovered in the course of my work. It is such voices which add value, worth and corroboration to what has been recorded in the official records.

It is exactly the same with the work of the Panel, although in this instance hearing the voices of victims-survivors will enable the Panel to decide whether to accept or challenge what was recorded in the records produced by the various institutions. This is only possible by listening to the voices of victims-survivors through their testimony.

KNOW SOMEONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE UPDATES?

If you are aware of anyone who would like to receive updates on our progress and receive further newsletters, please ask them to register their interest and be added to our mailing list by emailing:

secretariat@independentpanel.org.uk

You can also get in touch with us by:



Writing to:

Truth Recovery Independent Panel,
4th Floor, Equality House
7 - 9 Shaftesbury Square,
Belfast, BT2 7DB



Phone: 028 9052 0263 (Open Monday – Friday 11am - 12pm and 3pm - 4pm or leave a voicemail on our secure answering service any time outside of these hours.)

Find us also on:

