

## Last Date to Register to Provide Testimony

Please contact us by  
**Thursday 1st May 2025**  
to register to give your  
testimony.

## Truth Recovery Independent Panel Newsletter

### Seeking the Truth

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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- **Meet the Panel** - featured in this issue are Maria Cogley and Colin Smith

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

In this edition, we are delighted to share some updates from the Panel's Working Groups. These updates were shared with everyone who attended our in-person and online update meetings in December, and we wanted to share this information with those unable to attend.

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

- Maria Cogley, Victim-Survivor Representative Panel Member
- Colin Smith, Expert Member in International Human Rights Law and Domestic Law

**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.

### February 2025

Leaflet posted to all households in Belfast, Derry/ Londonderry and Newry.



### Feb - Mar 2025

Classified advertisements placed in UK, Ireland and international publications.



### 1 May 2025

Last date to register interest for giving testimony.



### Jan - Feb 2025

Targeted outreach with stakeholders in UK, Ireland, USA, Australia and Canada.



### Feb - Mar 2025

Digital advertising campaign takes place.



### Feb - Jun 2025

Series of general and topical engagement sessions.

## Working Group Updates

### Testimony and Analysis Working Group

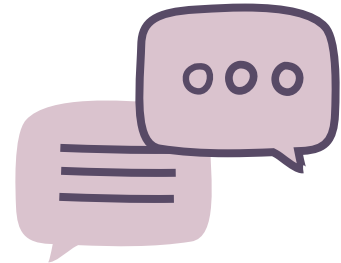
#### Testimony Taken / Available from 2024

**43** victim-survivor testimonies from 2018-19

**77** victim-survivor testimonies from 2024

**28%** Protestant family backgrounds

**72%** Roman Catholic family backgrounds



### Our Focus

Reflecting on the statistics above, the Panel is focusing on hearing from:

- people with experience of Protestant institutions, Workhouses, Laundries and Private Nursing Homes, and;
- people who worked or volunteered in one of the institutions and people who have knowledge of their pathways and practices.

This focus reflects our commitment to ensuring that all voices and perspectives are included in our work.

### Last Date to Register to Provide Testimony: 1 May 2025

To allow enough time for the Independent Panel to analyse testimonies and present the findings in our final report, the last date to register an interest to give testimony is **Thursday 1st May 2025**.

If you have not yet given testimony and are still considering doing so, please contact us before 1 May 2025.

If you have already contacted our Testimony Team to register to provide testimony, or have already provided your testimony to us, you do not need to do anything else.

To register, or if you have any questions, please:



**Call us on:** 028 9052 0263



**Email us at:** [testimony@independentpanel.org.uk](mailto:testimony@independentpanel.org.uk)



**Visit our website at:**

[www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk](http://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk)

We understand that this process can be difficult. We want to assure you that support is available to you before, during and after your participation in the testimony process. To access support services, please contact the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) by:



**Phone:** 028 9031 1678 (9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday)



**Email:** [support@vssni.org](mailto:support@vssni.org)

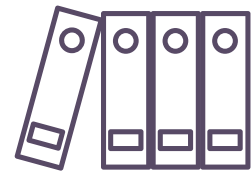


**Visit VSS website:** [www.victimsservice.org](http://www.victimsservice.org)

## Records and Archives Working Group

### What we do

Work with PRONI on identifying, accessing, cataloguing and digitising records relevant to the work of the Panel.



Hold discussions with relevant institutions, religious orders, private agencies and public bodies in relation to records and archives which may be relevant to the work of the Panel.

Assess and analyse relevant records, with the assistance of PRONI researchers, and contribute towards the Panel's various findings and reports.



### What Happens With Records of Private Institutions and Agencies?

The Panel has agreements in place that outline how we can access these records and ensure their secure storage.

Where possible, the records have been or will be moved to PRONI temporarily so that digital copies can be made. When they receive the record, PRONI will carry out work to repair or maintain the condition of the records if needed. The digital copies of the records are shared with the Panel for analysis.

## What Happens With Records of Public Bodies?

Relevant public bodies are still carrying out the survey of existing records for PRONI. Some of these records have already been transferred to PRONI where they are stored securely.

The Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 applies to public and private records.

## The Working Group Objectives

1

Ensure the Panel's records continue to be stored safely and correctly.

2

Make recommendations for a permanent independent archive.

3

Engage with victim-survivors for views on a permanent independent archive.

4

Assess and analyse relevant records, with the assistance of PRONI researchers, and contribute towards the Panel's various findings and reports.

## Access to Records, Advocacy, Genealogy, and Legal Services Working Group

### Access to Records Guidance: Online Version

In October 2024, we launched the online version of our Access to Records Guidance with the aim of helping people on their journey to access their records.

You can find the access to records guidance here on our website:

**[Access to Records | Independent Panel Truth Recovery NI](#)**

From 8 October – 27 November:

- **704** people visited the website
- **613** of which were new users

The table below shows the number of times each page on our website related to the guidance was viewed during this time.

Webpage	Number of views
<b>Access to Records Guidance Pages</b>	
Access to Records Landing Page	406
Accessing Your Records and Your Rights	143
Adoption Records	125
Institutional Records	118
Where To Start	84
Civil Records	57
Church and Other Records	44
Language and Terminology	17

## **Institutional Information Guides: Online Version**

On 8 October 2024, we published information about the institutions we are investigating. This includes what records for each institution exist, who holds them and how to access to them.

You can find the institutions pages here on our website:

**[The Institutions | Independent Panel Truth Recovery NI](#)**

The table below shows the number of times each institutional information page was viewed from 8 October - 27 November 2024.

Institution Information Pages	
The Institutions Landing Page	297
Mother and Baby Institutions / Homes	135
Marianvale Mother and Baby Home, Newry	125
Belfast Midnight Mission Rescue and Maternity Home / Malone Place	113
Thorndale Industrial Home	62
Pathways and Practices	57
Marianville Mother and Baby Home, Belfast	56
Workhouses	50
Thorndale House	48
Magdalene Laundries	41
Hopedene Hostel	37
Mater Dei Hostel	27
St Mary's Home, Derry / Londonderry	22
Deanery Flats	20
St Mary's Home, Belfast	19
Kennedy House	18
Mount Oriel	16
St Mary's Home, Newry	13
Other Institutions	3

## The Working Group Objectives

1

To disseminate our hard copy Access to Records Guidance to Survivors and all other possible users.

2

To supplement our guidance with updated information e.g. information relating to access to court records.

3

Engage with Survivors in relation to their experiences of accessing records, their views around the process and their use of our guidance if applicable.

4

Gather experiences from Survivors who may have used legal representation to assist in accessing records.



## Communications and Engagement Working Group

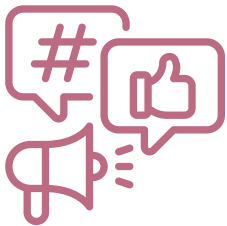
We continue to send updates and our bi-monthly newsletter to **158 individuals** and **2 peer support groups** on our mailing list.

Before Christmas, we had press coverage in local and national publications, including



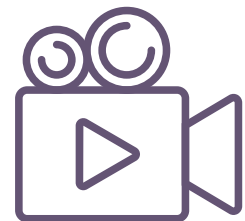
- Irish Echo (the Oldest Irish American Newspaper in USA)
- Irish Herald (San Francisco).

Our social media continues to grow:



- **322** followers on Facebook
- **219** followers on X
- Over **30,000** people have seen our Facebook posts.
- Over **75,000** people have seen our X posts.

Published **3 videos by victim-survivors** appealing for people to come forward, and **1 video with testimony facilitators** talking about the process.



## The Independent Panel Website



From May – November 2024, over **1,600** unique users visited the website, and the content was viewed **15,400** times.

Call to action posters sent to over 300 GP Surgeries.

Various articles in religious publications, including Salvation Army War Cry, Diocese of Down and Connor.



Leaflet distribution The Marian Hotel play reaching almost 3000 people over 15 shows.

## The Working Group Objectives

1

Leaflet drop to households across the North / NI.

2

Digital campaign to focus on hard-to-reach demographics and the wider Diaspora.

3

Classified ads appealing for people to come forward in international and UK publications.

4

Consult victims - survivors on a range of key issues.

5

Continue social media outreach.

## Meet the Panel

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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 Maria Cogley and Colin Smith.



**Maria Cogley**

Victim-Survivor Representative Panel Member

### **Why did you apply to be on the Panel?**

Understanding fully what happened in these institutions, other places and addresses used to closet women, girls, babies and young children away from their families, the outside world or any support is crucial for any investigative process to get to the complete truth.

Locating and accessing records is hugely important to me as they

provide the evidence, adding weight to peoples' testimonies. From my involvement in the writing of Practice Guidance for adoption agencies on behalf of the Department of Health, talking with other survivors and the difficult, tenacious and seemingly relentless pursuit of my own personal records, I have gained a solid understanding of the experiences, difficulties and barriers faced by other people trying to access information held about themselves.

When considering applying for a position on the Independent Panel, I was mainly motivated by the ongoing injustice of people being denied and hindered in their search for the basic information about themselves that every human being is entitled to. I wanted to be part of the continued work in guiding people and establishing where personal records, whether adoption, care or institutional records in Northern Ireland are held, by whom and how best to access them.

### **How does your experience and expertise add value to the work of the IP?**

I have been actively involved with the current Truth Recovery Process, TEO Consultation Forum and relevant support groups and have built relationships and valued friendships with fellow adopted adults and mothers affected by the institutions and forced family separation in Northern Ireland and beyond.

While I don't claim to speak for survivors individually, although I am happy to do so if and when asked, I have an understanding from talking with them of their similar recounts of experiences and the barriers faced: mothers who talk about abuses suffered, undeserved shame and lack of choice around consent for adoption and adopted adults who are still searching for the basic facts around their birth, adoption or time in care and the lifelong impact

forced family separation has had on them.

These issues and others are at the forefront of every discussion the Panel has and it is imperative that everything we do or decision we make has the best interests of survivors at the heart of it. Having three survivor members of the Panel ensures that focus is always central.

As a Senior Primary School Teacher of over 25 years I have amassed many transferable skills, from working and planning collaboratively with colleagues, communicating with other outside professional agencies such as social services to assisting with student teacher training with the education departments of universities, meaning I can be versatile and beneficial in other working environments. I am part of two of the Panel's four working groups, Communications and Engagement Working Group and Access to Records, Advocacy, Genealogy and Legal Services Working Group as well as my work with the Panel as a whole.

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

Hearing testimony from different cohorts of people connected is paramount to uncovering the truth about these institutions. The Panel needs to hear from those that can elaborate, explain, clarify and expose the operations behind the institutions, highlight the pathways in, out or instead of the institutions and give further detail about other organisations, bodies, agencies or individuals who provided these pathways.

We need testimony from people to explain the practices used by religious orders, churches; catholic and protestant, organisations, individual clergy members, social services and welfare agencies to

gain a deeper and necessary understanding of how these institutions functioned and who facilitated their operation. Even someone who may have lived across the road from one of these places or walked past every day may hold vital information.

### **What advice would give to victims-survivors starting the journey of applying for records?**

Never give up and never assume you have all the information held about you! Easier said than done and I know that from first-hand experience. The task of accessing records requires strength, resilience and a lot of tenacity. Don't accept no as the first answer if you believe records are held about you. It is not an easy thing to do emotionally and often records we receive are upsetting or disappointing but, on the other hand, there is an enormous sense of something I can't quite put my finger on when you do receive records. It can also be a time consuming and all-consuming task and difficult to keep track of requests for information made, so it is worthwhile keeping a record of all communications sent and received. A paper trail is crucial!

### **What has your experience of being on the IP been like so far?**

Emotional, difficult, rewarding, upsetting, frustrating, inspiring and challenging are the words that immediately spring to mind and that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to describing my experience so far as a Panel member. This work is so very important and necessary, and I couldn't have asked for more empathetic, dedicated and professional Panel members to work alongside. We began our work with nothing in place and have faced repeated challenges, delays and bureaucracy together with a determination to do our best.



**Colin Smith**

International Human Rights Law and Domestic Law

**Why did you apply to be on the Panel?**

I was very impressed when the Northern Ireland Executive accepted all of the recommendations of the Truth Recover Design Panel. Because of my experience representing victims and survivors in Ireland, I thought the proposal to establish an Independent Panel on the Hillsborough model was a very positive one, especially given the involvement of victims and survivors on the Panel itself.

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

I am a senior counsel practising in the field of human rights. I have long experience representing victims of historic abuse in Ireland, especially in the context of redress schemes. I was appointed to the Independent Panel because of my expertise in human rights law to ensure that the Panel could incorporate in its methodology a human-rights-based approach. This means looking at what happened through the prism of the UK's human rights obligations



while applying five over-arching principles to our work: universality, indivisibility, non-discrimination, participation and accountability.

The principle of universality requires us to recognise that everyone, whoever they may be, has human rights and is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. Indivisibility in human rights terms means that all human rights are inter-related, and so cannot be analysed in isolation. The principle of non-discrimination require us to recognise the inherent equality of all people, while at the same time making accommodation for difference and diversity insofar as it is relevant. The principle of participation is that everyone should be entitled to take part in decisions that affect them. In the context of an investigation, wide participation is important in ensuring that the whole truth is recovered. Accountability, in this context, refers to the accountability of the Panel to the Executive, and through it, to the Assembly and the people of Northern Ireland.

Applying these principles, the Panel will consider the part played by State as duty-bearer in the operation of the institutions, pathways and practices under investigation. It will also recognise victims and survivors as rights-holders entitled to understand what happened and to reclaim and enjoy their human rights.

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

We recognize that the testimony of witnesses is as important as records in understanding what happened in the institutions, pathways and practices under investigation. Victims and survivors have important evidence, but the testimony of other witnesses is also extremely valuable. The wider the participation in the investigation, the more comprehensive and nuanced the final report will be.



## **Why is it important to have the voice of VS heard in your work?**

The participation of victims and survivors is essential for a human-rights-based investigation. This means participation in the conduct of the investigation as well as participation through giving testimony. Without the contribution of the victims and survivors on the Panel, insights gained from lived experience would be unavailable. Similarly, without the testimony of victims and survivors, the investigation would depend on records produced by those who operated the institutions under investigation and by the public authorities, and given the circumstances of their creation, there is a risk that such records will not reflect the whole truth of what happened.

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

By giving them an opportunity to give testimony in a safe, non-confrontational and trauma-informed setting, the Panel provides victims and survivors with a mechanism to contribute to the official record of the operation of mother and baby institutions, Magdalene Laundries and workhouses, and their pathways and practices, in Northern Ireland during the 20th century. Depending on the wishes of victims and survivors, their testimony can be made available to future generations so that lessons for the future can be learned from the experience of the past.

Access to records is an important aspect of redress for victims and survivors because they are necessary to access the right to know the truth about one's own past. The Panel's Guidance on Access to Records will, we hope, help victims and survivors to navigate the system of access to records, and to access such support and

assistance as they need to interpret and understand the documents they obtain.

Ultimately, we hope that, together with the report of the public inquiry, the Panel's final report will provide victims and survivors with an account of what happened in the institutions, pathways and practices under investigations, why it happened and what level of responsibility the State bears. The integrated truth recovery process will also inform measures of redress for victims and survivors, as well as the process of memorialisation and future guarantees against repetition.

### **What advice would give to victims-survivors starting the journey of applying for records?**

Many records relating to the institutions under investigation are still controlled by the people and organisations that ran those institutions. Sometimes that control can be abused. It is important for victims and survivors to remember that access to records about you is a human right, guaranteed by Northern Irish law, and that the law is on your side.

The Panel's Guidance on Access to Records gives detailed advice about where to start in accessing records about you. We also recognise that once records have been obtained, they can contain information that is difficult to understand, and even information that is partial, unfair or wrong. It can be beneficial in these circumstances to access support from the Victims and Survivors Service, who can offer assistance in processing new information that has come to light.

### **What has your experience of being on the IP been like so far?**

My experience to date has been very positive. The Panel has

worked together very well, and the different expertise and experience of the members has proved to be very valuable, and the involvement of victims and survivors means that no decisions are made without the perspective of those with lived experience being taken into account.

The public authorities have, in the main, been supportive of our work, and, with a few notable exceptions, we have received good cooperation from most of the organisations which operated the institutions under investigation. I hope that the Truth Recovery Independent Panel will yet serve to be a model for future truth recovery processes in Ireland both north and south, and in other jurisdictions around the world.

## **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](mailto: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



**Calling us on:** 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:**

