



Home Affairs Committee

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John O'Brien
Secretary to the Inquiry
Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

8 March 2022

Dear John,

At the start of the Committee's oral evidence session, on 30 November 2022, the Chair invited any victims and survivors who had contributed to the inquiry process, and wished to provide feedback on their experience, to contact the Committee.

Whilst we were still discussing how we would go about setting up a formal questionnaire, the Committee received emails directly to its public email address. Consequently, we decided to continue with this much more informal and unstructured approach.

The feedback we received was mixed. We heard some examples of positive experiences, from survivors who had spoken about their experience for the first time to IICSA and had been encouraged to give statements to the police and seek counselling. However, we also heard strong criticism of the support provided. I would like to give you the opportunity to respond to some of the points raised in critical emails.

One contributor to the Truth project told us:

I watched the recent select committee on the iicsa, as I took part in the Truth Project back [...] Firstly, I just wanted to say thank you for asking about the support that was supposed to have been offered to the victims and survivors taking part. In my experience it was wholly inadequate and dangerously lacking. I am extremely angry and upset with the responses given by the members on the witness panel as they were untrue based on my personal experience and that of others I have spoken with. There was initially no 24hr support line in place at the time I took part in the project and no existing support services were informed in my local area [...]

Another contributor told us:

I was not offered extensive and comprehensive legal support when this matter was devastating for my family [...] and destructive of the mental health of each and all of us. Nor were we (or myself in particular) offered any psychological support whatsoever until *after* the [...] report had been published and I inquired why no support had been offered previously. We had as a family been through hell in order to decide whether to provide the evidence I did, and were offered no psychological assistance whatsoever. I had personally to provide out of my [...] financial provision to help my family cope with this matter. Finally, the level of care offered after the fact

was so minimal, a sort of 'suicide prevention' level that the Inquiry apologised [...] that it was irrelevant to and irrespective of our needs. Its agents failed in the first instance to provide a preparatory and provisional duty of care and then admitted that it could not provide the necessary after care as it was simply a statutory body and had no duty of care equivalent to the nature and extent of disclosure that it asked of me and my family.

The solicitor appointed by the Inquiry did not inform me or my family of any available psychological support whatsoever prior to publication of the [...] and the counsel to the Inquiry (delegating their authority to the support team) admitted as much [...] they apologised and the lead psychologist also wrote to apologise for this failure and the failure on the part of the Inquiry to be able to do anything meaningful whatsoever whether they had provided it earlier or not. The appointed solicitor did not inform me or my family of any available support - although seemingly there was none in any case - after the publication of the [...] report. That said, the appointed solicitor was excellent. It was simply that the 'extensive and comprehensive' support for witnesses mentioned by Professor Jay was not something in any way evident or evidenced in my longstanding dealings with the panel.

Some of these accounts were very concerning to read. Several contributors remarked, with anger, that the oral evidence provided to this committee was incorrect with regard to the level of support that was given to victims and survivors. I draw to your attention this extract from Professor Jay's evidence:

Due to its very nature, with it being such a sensitive issue, we were very conscious of the fact that so many people who would have contact with the inquiry could be traumatised or retraumatised if they had already been abused. We spent a great deal of time and money on ensuring that we had a safeguarding team that would meet all of those requirements.

In a public hearing, for example, where victims were being called as witnesses, we had a plan in place for when they were first contacted. They would get phone calls after that each week until it took place. They were usually already being supported by their legal team, but we offered this. We could not offer counselling and support indefinitely, naturally, because that was not our purpose, but we did provide that. We provided an out-of-hours service. There was a great deal of support offered before, during and after to victims who were witnesses, for example. [...] we had agreements with local authorities and the police, through Operation Hydrant, which we can talk more about. It was indeed extensive. It was a trauma-informed approach involving people who were well trained in using those approaches.¹

In a similar vein, you told us:

For almost an entire month from the time they said that they wanted to engage with the Truth Project, there was somebody professionally qualified making sure that they had all the support they needed. In the sessions themselves, when I say they were in control, that is exactly right. They controlled the sessions. The sessions were not run by asking questions. It was somebody saying what they wanted to say. They could stop when they wanted. They could take breaks when they wanted to. They could ask to go and speak to the person who was providing support at any point. It was a very comprehensive package, and the feedback around the support has been excellent. [...] We worked very hard with all the local areas to find out

¹ [Oral evidence: Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#), HC 916

the sorts of organisations that provide similar support in that area, and that information was given to people as we handed over. We did not just say, "We have finished now". We actually said, "We have done what we can do for you, but here are organisations in your area that can provide that support".

Firstly, I would be interested to hear your reflections on the criticisms levelled at the process.

Secondly, the Committee would like to understand what support or guidance IICSA received when setting up the truth project and inquiry hearings to ensure victims and survivors were protected?

Finally, the Committee wants to understand what IICSA has shared, regarding its lessons learnt from supporting victims and survivors, with the central Cabinet Office public inquiries team? If the support was indeed inadequate, and steps were taken to remedy that, it is very important that this experience is shared for all future inquiries.

I would appreciate a response by 26 March.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Diana Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping underline.

Dame Diana Johnson MP