



Office of the Chief Secretary

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Helen Hayes MP
Chair of Education Select Committee – Historic Forced Adoptions Enquiry
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Chair,

Following on from our previous letter dated 5th March 2026 we are grateful for the opportunity to clarify the language used at our evidence session and for the opportunity to address the additional source evidence.

First and foremost, we do wish to place on record to the Committee that we acknowledge and accept the evidence of those with lived experience who have provided testimony at the Education Select Committee and to other sources like media interviews. I am keen to restate that we recognise there are those who did not get the help and support they needed and deserved and The Salvation Army is committed to listening and learning from those who have bravely shared their painful histories.

My previous letter to you outlined my deep regret that my choice of words caused distress to members of the Committee and those with lived experience.

I would also like to clarify that references in my evidence to providing a “clean and safe space” and “encouragement to keep the child” were not intended as a general characterisation of all women’s experiences, nor a suggestion that conditions were consistently acceptable. We recognise that some people’s experiences in our mother and baby homes fell far short of what should have been expected and involved practices that we—and society—would not accept, advocate for, or repeat today.

With regards to the two specific questions raised during the session, I have consulted colleagues and would like to share the following to the committee.

Language and descriptions in our records

Your colleague Mark Sowards MP asked about the type of language used in our records in reference to women in our care. We have taken the opportunity to revisit our archives and to examine records in more detail in order to provide their most accurate representation.

Records show that we consistently captured a lot of factual information across a range of social services activity we were involved in delivering at the time, including: Name? / Age? / Date of entry? / Where from? / Manner of application? / Ever in prison? / Been a drink case? / Been in other homes? / Date of departure from Home? / Where to? / Satisfactory or not at departure? / and whether someone professed conversion, as in Christian faith. To stress, this is not the language we would use today.

What became apparent from our review last week was that the proforma used in the homes to collect personal information was the same stationery that was used across all types of Salvation Army women's social work settings at that time.

We also regularly collected information across all our services on whether people practiced a particular religion or converted to Christianity during their time with us. It is important to state that being a Christian has never been a barrier to receiving support from us and never will be. The language also changed over time for example, by the mid 1950's information such as 'drink case' was no longer being collected.

On the issue of whether details were captured relating to conception and whether sexual abuse was involved, this type of information was rarely captured. We are aware of some cases where incest is recorded and that the men responsible were being dealt with through the criminal justice system.

You asked some very specific questions around the standards and practices of our Mother and Baby Homes in relation to oral evidence at the committee and previous media reports around the Hopedene Mother and Baby home. I have outlined some additional information and research which I hope gives our contribution to the committee more context – I would be grateful for this to be accepted as further evidence to the committee.

Requiring mothers to work

Mother and baby homes received a mixture of private paying patients who chose to have their babies in our maternity wards and women who did not have the means to pay. For those who were unable to pay, they would have been expected to undertake what was described as 'house work' or 'domestic work'. Our records do not have a lot of information about what that meant but we know from personal testimony that work including cleaning, polishing, cooking and laundry, often until late in a pregnancy. We have read and reflected on how women have described this work as physically strenuous and how it felt like being a punishment for being pregnant. We recognise that this would have added physical and emotional stress.

Standards of care in the home

Our mother and baby homes were run by trained Midwives, and our records show that external Doctors attended difficult births. Some of our homes had modern maternity suites used by private patients as well as those who were unable to pay. We cannot know the circumstances of every birth, but we can be confident that pain relief was administered as standard practice.

When babies died

The loss of a child is incredibly traumatic and so when presenting this information, we do not wish to minimise the deep grief and pain that mothers would have felt if their baby died in our care.

We were also very troubled by the report of unmarked baby graves and again looked at our archives to see if we could understand more. The evidence is limited; some records show that the burials were paid for by a range of sources including family, insurance, National Insurance death grant and Welfare Officer. We understand that if a family could not afford a funeral, the local authority took responsibility for burying a child in public cemeteries which included unmarked graves. We cannot know whether this was ever properly explained to grieving mothers in our homes, but we do recognise how painful it will be to learn no formal grave site exists when trying to find out more about your child or relative.

Meaningful Consent

From the 1880s to the early 1950s, The Salvation Army was involved in the adoption of approximately 850 babies. After 1953, adoptions were managed by external agencies. However, we continued to run mother and baby homes, and we were responsible for caring for the women who stayed in them.

We have reflected on the testimonies of women in our care who describe feeling scared about what might happen to them and feeling like they were being punished for being pregnant. In these circumstances, we recognise that consent for adoptions cannot have always been meaningfully given and that some adoptions would have been arranged against the wishes of the mother. We would remind the Committee that the ruling principle of The Salvation Army at the time was that the mother and child should be encouraged to be kept together unless there were exceptional circumstances which would clearly render this as inadvisable.

Following our presentation at the Committee we can now confirm that approximately a third of babies born in our mother and baby homes were adopted within these settings; a third of babies stayed with their mother; and the remaining third went to a variety of places such as temporary foster parents, or children's homes. These figures do not include private patients.

I hope this additional information helps provide helpful context for my evidence. I can only speak to findings based on our records which uses language and describes practices which we would not accept now. Being unmarried and pregnant was perilous for most women and we are sorry for the times when those most vulnerable of people turned to us for help and we fell short.

The Salvation Army is grateful to the work of the committee but especially to those with lived experience who have shared their painful histories to help shine a light on how society treated them. Furthermore, we appreciate the opportunity that the Committee has given to allow us to reflect on our role in society at that time.

We are keen to hear from those who have had poor experiences in our homes to give opportunity for personal apology to these individuals and their families.

Yours sincerely,



Colonel Peter Forrest
CHIEF SECRETARY