

## Opening Statement of Carmel McDonnell Byrne 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019

Christine Buckley myself and others have fought for truth and reconciliation for survivors over the decades. In 2000 Christine and I founded the Christine Buckley Centre to provide education and support to Survivors. Though sadly Christine is no longer with us I continue to provide support both at the Centre and through my outreach work.

The State's apology to victims in 1999 though meaningful at the time, is being undermined by this Bill.

The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was established to "address the continuing effects of child abuse." It is from my experience and contact with survivors that the Bill is likely to cause practical, emotional and psychological problems for survivors. It also recommended that "*the lessons of the past should be learned*" and that the acknowledgement by the State and the religious orders of their failures was only the first step. Further investigations were and are necessary. This Bill will not allow such investigations to take place.

The Commission also recommended that Family tracing services should be continued, and this Bill has the potential to make family reunification more difficult. The institutions operated a policy of separating siblings and family visits were discouraged. Every day in the Christine Buckley Centre we speak to Survivors still searching for the truth of their past, their identity and family history. We also witness Survivors finding family members and the joy that brings.

Survivors did not agree to the destruction or sealing of their records when they agreed to participate in the Commission and or when they applied to the Redress Board. They want their often-harrowing experience of giving testimony to matter and to ensure that this never happens again. All Survivors should have the right to decide for themselves if they would like to access any records relating to them. It's very important on our healing journey that we are empowered to make decisions and choices something denied us as children. Survivors deserve the right to own a copy of their testimony if they want it.

It is important for my children, grandchildren and future generations to understand what happened in Ireland and how thousands survived this very harsh and shameful regime.

In 2002 survivors attended a poignant service the Grove of Reflection in Ballygannon Wood, Rathdrum. Mr Seamus Brennan TD the Government Chief Whip, Chairman of the Millennium Committee said: "This occasion is an opportunity to salute the bravery of individual victims who were determined to tell their stories and seek justice, and in doing so, shone a light into the dark corners of our past and present".

There is a Grove in each Province in Ireland which has a seat with the inscription “***May the future ensure that those most vulnerable will never again endure such pain and deprivation***”.

I hope all records could be held in an interactive museum along with memorabilia such as the pliers used for making the rosary beads, samples of the type of clothing used throughout Ireland’s industrial schools. As part of the healing journey, survivors have written poetry, stories, plays or created artistic pieces and music. Some of these depict their own personal journeys and the pain they have endured especially any letters to and from families at the time etc and these need to be available to the public and researchers. I have no problem with having my testimony available to the public.

I believe a museum can help the Survivors and their families, and this is particularly important given the inter-generational impacts of child abuse.

We cannot forget what happened to the thousands of children that were incarcerated into 200 institutions run by church and state.