

# Abuse victim: We were made out to be bad guys

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Campaigner: David Whelan

CHILD abuse survivors were treated as 'bad guys' by the Scottish Government as they campaigned for justice, an inquiry heard yesterday.

The claim came from David Whelan, spokesman for Former Boys and Girls Abused of Quarrier's Homes (FBGA).

In evidence at the Child Abuse Inquiry, Mr Whelan – who suffered abuse at homes in the 1960s and 1970s – also recalled how he was targeted by anonymous callers, adding that others had come forward only to face intimidation.

At the hearing in Edinburgh, he described how his organisation's survivors were being treated by official attempts to address abuse in 2005. 'We were the bad guys at one point – we were left out of the processes,' he said. 'We kept knocking on the door to be in the processes.'

'It just seemed completely unreasonable for us to be excluded when we had so much to contribute.' Discussing the road to a full hearing for survivors, he added: 'It's taken far too long. It shouldn't have taken this long. I've heard people say they're really difficult issues. They're not that difficult – you just address them.'

His claim of being treated as 'bad guys' came a day after another victims' charity head said government officials described survivors as 'nutters'.

On Tuesday, Helen Holland, of In Care Survivors Service Scotland, said she challenged a civil servant on why so few victims were present at an official meeting and was told: 'We can't have the room full of nutters.'

Yesterday, Mr Whelan described how his journey to working as a campaigner began when the wife of his abuser, John Porteous, contacted him, opening 'a can of worms' in his past.

Mr Whelan said she had wanted him to be a character witness over other allegations facing Porteous, who was sentenced to five years in jail in 2002 after the abuse he committed at a Quarrier's Home in Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire, came to light.

Mr Whelan said he believes anonymous abusive calls he received after stepping forward stemmed from that original call from the wife of Porteous. He told the hearing she phoned his sister to ask for his number, saying: 'Oh, we're having a reunion, we're trying to get in touch with David.'

He added: 'I'm ex-directory and I received abusive calls at home from a number of people. I know where they got the number.'

Mr Whelan said he had also seen other cases where 'there were attempts before the trial to stop witnesses giving evidence'. In his testimony he also explained how some victims continue to distrust the system to the extent that they do not trust the public inquiry.

He said: 'There's clearly a mistrust of the system, there's a mistrust of the establishment, there's a mistrust of the professionals because of what happened.'

'I just think survivors have been let down so much over so many years that the trust is gone for many of them.'

He also took aim at the BBC for a documentary it produced in 2003 called Secrets or Lies which aired the theory that Porteous could have been the 'victim of a conspiracy' where false allegations were made for compensation.

He claimed it forced him to waive his anonymity, saying: 'I would never have wanted to give that up but basically I had no choice because it was saying I lied in a court of law.'

The inquiry continues.

'Survivors have been let down'