

Scottish Daily Mail

Child abuse could have taken place despite lack of convictions, inquiry told

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The boss of a childcare provider has said crimes against youngsters could have taken place even if individuals were not convicted of offences.

Alice Harper, chief executive officer of Quarriers, told the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry on Monday she was “deeply saddened” by evidence of harm at its former residential homes in Inverclyde.

She described “unacceptable” levels of punishment and children being treated as “domestic labour” by house parents at the Quarriers Village cottages.

It was heard seven former members of staff have been convicted of forms of abuse – John Porteous, Joseph Nicholson, Mary Drummond, Samuel McBrearty, Alexander Wilson, Ruth Wallace and Euphemia Ramsay.

However, she added that more crimes could have been committed without there being any criminal repercussions.

Ms Harper said: “Personally I’m deeply saddened and shocked by the evidence I have heard. I will never forget that.

“On behalf of Quarriers, I unreservedly apologise to those who suffered abuse while in the care of the organisation.”

She added: “I accept that simply because individuals were not convicted of certain offences, does not mean they did not abuse children in the way that was alleged.”

The inquiry has previously heard evidence of sexual, physical and emotional abuse inflicted upon children by employees at the village.

It operated largely as a child residential institution from the 19th century until the 1980s.

In most cases there were one or two people who ran cottages looking after the children, sometimes as many as 30 in one home.

Most claims of abuse were said to have been in relation to alleged offences between the 1950s and 1980s.

The witness said a “closed culture” existed in the properties, which did not allow for the children’s voices to be heard.

Ms Harper added: “The whole set-up at Quarriers made it difficult for children to complain. There’s also evidence that when children did complain they were not believed.”

The inquiry is currently investigating residential childcare establishments run by non-religious and voluntary organisations.

Meanwhile, Charles Coggrave said that too much emphasis was placed on preventing harm from strangers, rather than those youngsters knew.

The head of safeguarding and aftercare for Quarriers also agreed the charity’s former village model created an environment which made it easier for them to be preyed upon.

Mr Coggrave said: “When I was a child, my mum and dad would warn me about strangers.

“There was even some public safety awareness campaign and stranger danger was a thing.

“The evidence is that – particularly talking about sexual abuse – that’s much more common with people you know, by people known to the child.”

The inquiry before judge Lady Smith continues on Tuesday. (Jeff Holmes/PA)

