

Children abused by charities

Inquiry slates Barnardo's and others for 'harsh, rigid' regimes

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Lady Smith: Victims 'mistreated'

CHILDREN suffered abuse and 'cruel punishment' for decades at homes run by charities, an inquiry has heard.

A judge ruled vulnerable youngsters in the care of Barnardo's, the UK's largest children's charity, Quarriers and Aberlour Child Care Trust were physically and sexually abused by staff.

The incidents came to light after the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry investigated the treatment of youngsters at establishments in Scotland operated by charities between 1921 and 1991.

Lady Smith, inquiry chairman, said: 'For many children, physical abuse became part of their daily lives.'

All three charities are under police investigation.

CHILDREN placed in the care of three charities were subjected to a catalogue of abuse spanning decades, a judge has ruled.

Lady Smith yesterday said youngsters were physically, emotionally and sexually abused at Barnardo's – the UK's largest children's charity – Quarriers and Aberlour Child Care Trust.

The judge, chairman of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI), said that the charities' founders 'would surely have been appalled' as she condemned their 'harsh, rigid regimes'.

In a 150-page report she revealed 'many children did not find the warmth, care and compassionate comfort they needed', while 'scant regard was paid to their dignity'.

She said: 'The previous lives of the children who came into the care of the QAB [Quarriers, Aberlour, Barnardo's] providers had all been blighted in some way, whether by being abused in the family home, the death of one or more parents, parental illness, families who could not cope with caring for them, abandonment or by other similar circumstances.

'The QAB providers could have made a real and positive difference to every child but that did not happen. For many, further damage was inflicted.'

Previous reports have been highly critical of religious orders but Lady Smith said the 'extent of sexual abuse – including abuse which also constituted a serious breach of trust – was greater in this case study'.

She said there were 'forms of cruel punishment' – such as the use of 'the shed' at Quarriers and the 'cooler' [a locked cupboard] at Aberlour – where children were kept in isolation.

Harrowing evidence revealed allegations that children had been raped and beaten, and Lady Smith confirmed that 'children were subject to... practices that facilitated the engagement by sexual predators'.

All three charities are still the subject of ongoing police investigations.

The third phase of the inquiry looked at the abuse of children at establishments operated by QAB between 1921 and 1991.

Outlining examples uncovered by the £27million inquiry, Lady Smith said: 'Children were physically abused.

They were cruelly treated. They were hit, slapped and beaten with open hands, knuckles, and implements... they were kicked. They were punched. They were pushed. Children had carbolic soap forced into their mouths.

'Heads were forced into toilet pans and water flushed over them. A child's head was held under bath water. For many children, physical abuse became part of their daily lives.'

Quarriers was likened to a prison camp – one survivor said: 'We just existed. This was life.'

Physical abuse of children was also 'being perpetrated by persons in managerial positions at establishments in Scotland run

by Barnardo's'. Children were 'Hit, slapped and beaten'

Lady Smith found the abuse at QAB 'included lewd sexual innuendo, indecent assaults, lewd and libidinous practices', and 'rape and sodomy'.

David Whelan, spokesman for Former Boys and Girls Abused in Quarriers (FBGA), said: 'We have always said the criminal convictions of eight Quarriers ex-employees for child abuse which included physical, emotional and sexual abuse in all its forms represented the tip of the iceberg and this is borne out by the findings of Lady Smith.'

Alice Harper, chief executive of Quarriers, said: 'We repeat our unreserved apology to those who suffered abuse while in our care and acknowledge that children were subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse.'

Aberlour chief executive Sally-Ann Kelly said: 'We welcome today's interim findings from Lady Smith and wish to again reiterate our unreserved apology to those who suffered abuse while in the care of Aberlour.'

Martin Crewe, director of Barnardo's Scotland, said: 'We apologise to those children who suffered abuse while they were in the care of Barnardo's.'

The inquiry, launched in 2015, will publish its final findings 'as soon as reasonably practicable'.