

# ‘Endemic’ child abuse was part of everyday life, inquiry told

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**Lady Smith has begun hearing closing submissions about abuse in care homes.**

Children lived in fear due to the “widespread abuse” of potentially thousands of boys and girls in care homes, an inquiry into child abuse has been told.

Decades of abuse at residential institutions, including the former Quarriers Village cottages in Inverclyde, is being investigated by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry.

The inquiry has heard evidence of sexual, physical and emotional abuse inflicted upon children by employees at the village, which served as a child residential institution from the 19th century until the 1980s.

In the relevant period, certainly hundreds - if not thousands - of children suffered abuse in Quarriers

***Stuart Gale QC***

**Stuart Gale QC, on behalf of the Former Boys and Girls Abused in Quarriers (FBGA), described the abuse as “endemic in certain cottages and was a part of everyday life”.**

**“In the relevant period, certainly hundreds – if not thousands – of children suffered abuse in Quarriers,” he told the inquiry, urging judge Lady Smith to address the scale of the abuse in her findings.**

**Mr Gale referenced the apology by the organisation and quoted the evidence of chief executive Alice Harper accepting “there was widespread abuse of children at Quarriers”.**

**He argued Quarriers “must have known several decades ago about the scale and nature of the abuse which went on”.**

**“It is a matter of regret that an apology of this nature was not issued many years ago,” he said.**

**“It is known that in the period since 1930 to date, in excess of 30,000 children were in residential care in Quarriers.**

**“The majority of applicants who gave evidence made it clear that they were not alone in suffering abusive practices but that they observed and were aware that many of their contemporaries were abused.”**

**Mr Gale added: “The number of identified abusers, whether convicted or not, clearly dispels the suggestion that abusers were rare bad apples within a barrel of otherwise kind and competent carers.”**

**Detailing recurring issues in witnesses’ statements, Mr Gale took aim at the “underlying atmosphere of fear” which existed in Quarriers.**

*James Peoples QC*

In addition to addressing alleged sexual abuse in the care homes, he said: “Themes have emerged which have been consistent over the years – the casual violence, whether simply gratuitous or under the guise of supposed punishment handed out to children, the appalling treatment of those who were bed wetters, the cruelty of force feeding, the separation of siblings within the village and the isolation of children from those in the outside world.

Even if love and affection were not deliberately denied, the work was demanding, it was not well valued and was relentless

**Stuart Gale QC, Former Boys and Girls Abused in Quarriers**

**“The nature and level of abuse that has been disclosed in this case study indicates that some of the house parents who were abusers were not just persons who were out of their depth in caring for children – given the depravity of the abuse that we have heard of, the characterisation of some house parents and carers as ‘evil’ has to be said.”**

**He praised the bravery of witnesses coming forward and giving statements before the inquiry and rebuked critics who have doubted their claims.**

**“Applicants came before the inquiry with a range of personalities and characters, to be expected of a large number of disparate individuals,” he said.**

**“The chancers, the money grabbers, and the nutters were notable by their absence and those who previously castigated survivors in those terms should take a long hard look at themselves.”**

Beginning the closing submissions of the latest stage of investigations, counsel James Peoples QC said the evidence heard by the inquiry painted a picture of “children who were powerless” and felt they would not be believed if they reported abuse, describing a tendency for a system of “controlling” the children rather than caring for them.

Speaking about the work of the people who ran the cottages, which sometimes had up to 30 children in each home, Mr Peoples said: “Even if love and affection were not deliberately denied, the work was demanding, it was not well valued and was relentless.

“This resulted in variable standards of childcare – some good and some bad, children who were afraid to report, or were not listened to when they did, and no time to provide nurturing and affection.”

More than 100 people have now given either oral or written statements as evidence during the 42 days of the inquiry into three child residential institutions – Quarriers, Barnardos and Aberlour.

The inquiry in Edinburgh continues on Tuesday.