

15 minutes of fury as victim relives ordeal

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A WOMAN who was beaten and sexually abused after being sent to an orphanage as a toddler yesterday launched a furious attack on the charity responsible for her care.

The anonymous witness, using the pseudonym Elizabeth, was being questioned at the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) when she vented her anger at 'cruel' Quarrier's.

She broke down as she told the hearing the organisation had caused physical and mental problems among former residents who were abused and humiliated.

Elizabeth halted a QC's questioning to deliver an emotional 15-minute speech after chairman Lady Smith said she could 'be angry' if she wanted to as she gave evidence.

The witness, who was born in 1955, was at Quarrier's Village, near Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire until 1968. She said: 'I came to them as a three-year-old. I became a product of their system and rules.' She said former residents who suffered abuse were now 'walking problems with illnesses, we are costing the Government with benefits, using daft therapies'.

Elizabeth told the hearing in Edinburgh: 'They're responsible, they need to take responsibility. They weren't all wonderful – they were dishonest and they were cruel.'

They had a profound effect on people. 'We were kids. We weren't even street-wise, we lived in their container, so even the big world outside scared the hell out of me.'

In one incident, a member of staff 'lost her cool' in the washroom of the home before striking Elizabeth's head off the side of the bath.

Children were beaten with wooden spoons and Elizabeth was forced 'vile' liver, while on another occasion a staff member slapped her on the face when she caught her playing with a Ouija board to try to contact her dead mother.

Elizabeth slapped her in return and expected to be punished but 'not one word was said'. She also said she was sexually abused by a man who worked in a nearby shop.

The witness said she had later tried to recover records from her time at the home, but believes some of them have been held back.

Elizabeth said she was ready to take legal action against Quarrier's over the loss of records, adding: 'I'm having a say in the hope that that will make me become completely free. I wasn't born in this world to be a prisoner of a system that let me down.'

Another witness, who used the name Joyce, was born in 1949 and sent to Quarrier's Village in 1957 before leaving in 1962.

She said she had been hit with a hairbrush, adding: 'It was unusual to have a day when someone was not hit or punished.'

Other punishments included children having to stand with their hands behind their heads for hours.

Joyce said a member of staff had pushed her head under the water at bath time, adding: 'I really did think she was going to kill me.' She once ran away in only her pants and tried to summon help but was unable to find anyone.

On another occasion, a member of staff kicked Joyce in her stomach, lifting her off the ground, and as she fell she hit her head off a stone sink, knocking her unconscious.

She said: 'I came to, I was hysterical. I could not stop screaming.'

She put me to bed and was very nice to me for the rest of the day.'

When she was ten, she and other girls were ordered to stand on a four-year-old girl who they were told had misbehaved, as she lay on the floor.

Joyce said: 'She was screaming.' She said this was 'one of the worst memories' of her time at Quarrier's and had left her feeling guilty.

Children would run away from the home because of the regime, leading James Peoples, QC, senior counsel to the inquiry, to compare her account to 'a scene out of Colditz'.

Between 1878 and the mid-1980s, more than 30,000 youngsters stayed at Quarrier's Village.

The inquiry continues.