

Charity fails to provide records for 40 years of child abuse

Mike Wade

June 28 2017, 12:01am, The Times



The Quarriers organisation told the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry it had been unable to find punishment books or minutes

A charity has claimed it has no relevant records of child abuse from a 40-year period during which its staff physically and sexually assaulted young residents.

The Quarriers organisation, founded to offer a “loving family” to orphaned and destitute children, told the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry it had been unable to find punishment books or minutes from any postwar senior management meeting where the abuse of children was discussed, until the closure of its children’s facility in 1989.

Yet over the same period, four men and three women who worked at Quarriers village in Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire, were convicted of sexual and physical abuse. More than 20 former residents have made complaints of abuse dating to the 1970s.

Campaigners questioned whether records had been destroyed on purpose.

Dave Whelan, who lived in Quarriers from 1969 to 1974, and was abused by staff, said he was shocked by evidence provided by Alice Harper, the charity’s chief executive.

A charity has claimed it has no relevant records of child abuse from a 40-year period during which its staff physically and sexually assaulted young residents.

“I think given the timescale of where the records are missing, and the amount of convictions in that timescale, it makes me really seriously concerned,” Mr Whelan said. “Were they destroyed on purpose? Certainly it was negligent.

“I believe [punishment books] existed because in law they had to keep them [but] there are no punishment books, no records of regulation by the state.

“It is a systemic failure about the oversight of the organisation.”

Quarriers village, founded by William Quarrier in 1871, had 43 houses, which for long periods housed more than 1,000 children between them, every year. Until the 1960s boys and girls lived separately. Boys were under the care of a house father and a house mother (usually a married couple), while girls were looked after by a house mother and house auntie.

The inquiry heard that house mothers and fathers required no formal childcare training until the 1960s and were employed on the basis that they were good Christians and wanted to work with children.

James Peoples, counsel for the inquiry, said: “In practice, house parents enjoyed a very large measure of autonomy for a very long time.”

Ms Harper agreed and accepted that there had been “a significant lack of training and supervision in childcare”.

She added: “Nothing I’ve read or researched shows an understanding of a child’s emotional or psychological needs.”

The inquiry heard that one of the seven convicted offenders, jailed about 12 years ago, had been accused of abuse by a child in the 1980s. The child was referred to a psychologist, but in the end their story was not believed, Ms Harper said.

Mr Whelan said he had no doubt that contemporary records still exist from the 1970s of allegations of child abuse.

He said: “A number of children did report abuse to the superintendent in my time. My sister reported it. There is a psychologist’s report in my sister’s file that records she reported it. It talks about how the house parents treated her and myself very harshly.

“The inquiry needs to get someone to go in to look at these records.”

A letter from the chairman of the Quarriers senior board, dated 1937, demonstrated that “autonomous” and largely unsupervised house parents were capable of extreme brutality and corporal punishment.