

Report from the Let's Be Honest Group

September 2019 to September 2020

Founded within the Bishops' Conference Marriage & Family Life Office in the Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales' Department for Social Justice, in response to Pope Francis' Letter to the People of God (20 August 2018) concerning the Church's response to victims and survivors of abuse.

The report is presented in four sections:

- 1. Foundations and Membership p 1**
- 2. Consultation p 2-4**
- 3. Action and Projects p 5-10**
- 4. Conclusion p 10-11**

Let's Be Honest Group

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1.0 Foundations and Membership

1.1 Founded within the Bishops' Conference

Marriage & Family Life Office in the Department for Social Justice, in response to Pope Francis' Letter to the People of God (20 August 2018) concerning the Church's response to victims and survivors of abuse, the Let's Be Honest (LBH) working group was officially formed in **September 2019**. Prior to this, Bishop Peter Doyle and the MFL team led preparatory consultations with members of the Survivors' Advisory Panel (SAP), Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS), the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC), and the former head of the office for pastoral support/child protection in the Boston Archdiocese, and the Pontifical Council for the Protection of Minors.

1.2 Let's Be Honest group membership

- Rt Rev David Oakley, Chair of CBCEW Committee for Marriage & Family Life in the Department for Social Justice
- Rev Andrew Browne, Survivor, member of SAP
- Frances Healy, Survivor, member of SAP
- Marie Grant, Survivor, member of SAP
- Caroline Dollard, CBCEW Marriage & Family Life (LBH Convenor)
- Martin Foster, Director, CBCEW Liturgy Office
- Kathryn Turner, CBCEW Spirituality Committee
- Danielle Dixon, Safeguarding Co-ordinator, Diocese of Northampton
- Elisabeth Fisher, Chair, Archdiocese of Birmingham Safeguarding Commission
- Sr Ellen Flynn, DC, Conference of Religious
- Rev Eugene Curran, CM, Conference of Religious
- Louise Carter, Director of Formation (UK), L'Arche Community

“So much of our ecclesial thinking in this area is concerned with the legal, the administrative, and being seen to do things in a manner that finds outside approval. This is the first material I have come across which works on a truly theological basis and takes seriously the experiential. It makes me feel very confident that the work of the Let's Be Honest group is necessary.” Rt Rev David Oakley, Bishop of Northampton

1.3 Having identified a gap in provision, and guided by the journeys of victims and survivors themselves, the remit for LBH is to research and support the development of theologically sound pastoral, spiritual and liturgical resources, for accompanying victims and survivors of abuse, their families, and affected parish communities, and to foster understanding, reflection and informed listening, with dialogue about initial and long-term spiritual questions and needs. Such a path runs in parallel to any therapeutic or other professional help in processing traumatic psychological and emotional issues.

1.4 The principles governing the work of LBH that emerged through conversations in 2018/early 2019 were (i) that all pastoral support of victims and survivors in a faith-based context, together with the safeguarding structures, must be rooted in a deeper understanding of the imperatives of the gospel and Church teaching, **to put the victim first**, and care for those who are hurting in any way. And (ii) that all LBH do is founded on who we are as 'Church', the Body of Christ, and when one suffers, the whole body suffers.

1.5 Directed by these principle of putting the victim first and Church as Body of Christ, there followed a need to provide **theologically enriched safeguarding training** to help others understand both the human and spiritual impact and rupture caused by abuse. *The Letter to the People of God*¹ underscores the common responsibility of *all* the baptised members of the Body of Christ in this ministry of healing, and the formation for this ministry to be open to all.

2.0 Consultation: building relationships of mutual learning, support and enrichment

2.1 From its beginnings, the LBH Group have been inspired by the breadth of wisdom and expertise gleaned over many years by victims/survivors themselves, and those who have accompanied them, with a concern for integrating their Christian faith and spirituality with emotional and psychological recovery. One task that LBH has undertaken is to begin conversations with some individuals and groups, and to bring these insights to the work of the Group. These have included:

(i) National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC) Chair, 6 March 2019 meeting:

¹ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html accessed 01.09.20

“I wish to record my thanks for all those involved in bringing this forward and the significant step it takes to bring safeguarding within a liturgical and spiritual context and how to achieve it in a sensitive way. I would hope this is the start of a significant impact to influence and bring into a wider domain how we address issues to survivors and the parish community within the Church's approach to safeguarding.” Chris Pearson

(ii) **Archdiocese of Boston, USA** Barbara Thorp (former head of the Cardinal's office for Pastoral Support and Child Protection in the Archdiocese, with 23 years pastoral ministry in Boston) generously gave time to face-to-face and Zoom meetings, sharing her experience within several US dioceses, and her design and implementation of the Boston response to the clergy abuse crisis. The latter included: a nine-day Pilgrimage of Atonement for parishes profoundly impacted by the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults by clergy; Cardinal's weekly commitment to carefully facilitated meetings with individual survivors and groups of survivors, enabling them to highlight the things most important to them, and to express any concerns. The pastoral and spiritual care commitment to a Christ-centred response in Boston embraced those who had been abused and their families as brothers and sisters in Christ. Shame, fear and denial were obstacles, but the constant refrain was, “To rebuild trust, actions and words, must be *trustworthy*.”

“The work of the LBH project is a living witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ - as the deep sorrow and anguish of Martha and Mary spoke to the heart of Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” John 11: 21. Jesus, through the LBH ministry, invites each one of us to be the hands that roll away the stone and despite the stench to gently be the hands to untie the bands that bind him to set him free.” Barbara Thorp

(iii) **Baroness Sheila Hollins** spoke to LBH following her accompaniment of a group of survivors to the plenary meeting of the CBCEW Bishops' Conference in Valladolid, May 2019. She was encouraging about the work of LBH in putting the needs of survivors first, and in the path forward, for survivors to be key in leading the healing and caring within the Church. She suggested working with Catholic therapists, and the setting up of local LBH-style groups.

(iv) **Grief to Grace** Fr Dominic Allain gave LBH a seminar on the Grief to Grace retreat experience, a powerful example of pastoral/spiritual/psychological accompaniment towards healing. Survivor members of LBH agreed that this was a process that would be profoundly helpful to many. They were, however, concerned that the dioceses or religious order where the abuse had taken place should meet the costs of all retreats / therapies / counselling so that no survivor who needed them should be excluded: few survivors could afford to pay for these from their own resources, nor should they be expected to do so.

(v) **L'Arche Communities** Louise Carter, Director of Formation, L'Arche UK, is leading the UK communities in their response to the Jean Vanier abuse scandal. Like LBH, L'Arche are working towards a better integration of 'safeguarding' language and training with the language of 'pastoral accompaniment', with processes that support the residents and staff as the truth of the abuse is revealed. L'Arche receive secular funding and are accountable to external bodies. Louise Carter was subsequently invited to join LBH.

"The Church has been frightened of utilising its own strength – and been far too orientated to statutory demands, and therefore not putting first our strengths as believers, as Church, up front." Louise Carter

(vi) **Boundary Breaking (BB)**, the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University, led by Dr. Marcus Pound, with Dr. Catherine Sexton, Dr. Giuseppe Bolotta and Prof. Paul D Murray, is a three-year research project in collaboration with survivors and organisations in the Catholic Church, examining to what extent aspects of Catholic culture and understanding have contributed to the creation of an environment in which abuse, and its subsequent mishandling, was and is possible. BB engages theologically with the issues, whilst drawing on expertise across a range of disciplines. The project aims to identify and assess areas of potential weakness within the Catholic Church and, where appropriate, consider what role Catholic doctrine and understanding can play in ensuring that safeguarding is not simply a matter of process and policy, but that it is also theologically and culturally embedded within the Church's self-understanding. BB will enable academic reflection on data, towards constructive solutions and its researchers have expressed an interest in the LBH pilot scheme, resources and continuing conversations that explore the theological shift concerning view of 'children and childhood.'

"I was particularly interested in your two trajectories: 1. Spiritual and pastoral care of victims and survivors; 2. Victim or survivor-centred approach to Gospel-centered safeguarding, - and perceive our work as both different in some regards, but also mutually informing and beneficial. We have been interviewing several organisations, both Catholic and secular, dealing with safeguarding. Many of them deal with the issue in quite procedural/legalistic terms and hence we are convinced that our research would greatly benefit from conversations with your team." Dr. Marcus Pound

(vii) **Ian Elliott**, Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Review Panel, has also been in communication with LBH, and shares in the focus that puts the victim, their views and needs, at the centre. He is particularly interested in LBH modules for safeguarding training that have a gospel-based approach.

"The Gospel says reach out with compassion, empathy, and share the suffering." Ian Elliott

3.0 Action and Projects of the Let's Be Honest group in its first year

Initial Period of Reflection

3.1 Group members engaged in a period of reflection, identifying and reviewing material that informed the objectives of the group, including articulating the theological, scriptural and doctrinal foundations for pastoral care and protection of those most vulnerable and most in need. Members explored the common responsibility of all members of the Church for the healing of victims, and ways in which the safeguarding structures and pastoral /spiritual response to victims could work together. A continuing train of thought concerns the practical application of 'the art of accompaniment', and encouragement of investment in strong, compassionate relationships, coming alongside and listening to survivors, and being guided by them in meeting needs.

"Today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit. If, in the past, the response was one of omission, today we want solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense, to become our way of forging present and future history. And this in an environment where conflicts, tensions and above all the victims of every type of abuse can encounter an outstretched hand to protect them and rescue them from their pain " Pope Francis²

LBH Projects in the first year

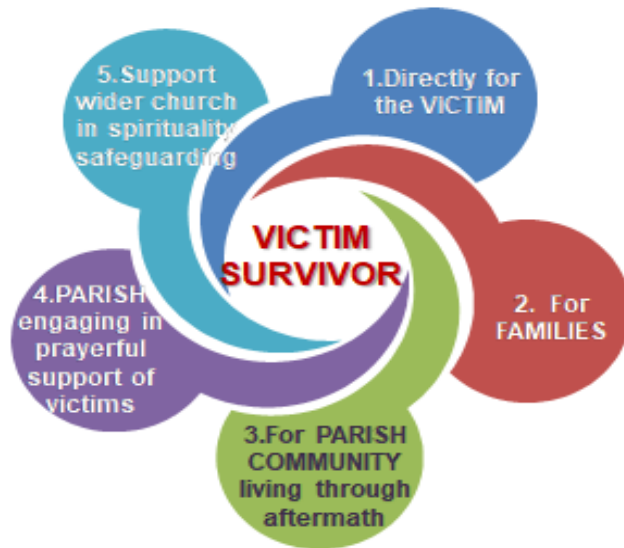
3.2 The tasks for the LBH group were set in a theological/spiritual framework covering two main projects in the first instance.

- **Project 1:** Resources for pastoral accompaniment and opportunities for prayer/spiritual support.
- **Project 2:** Resources/modules for safeguarding training.

3.3 Project 1: Liturgical/spiritual material accompanying the response to abuse to cover five areas:

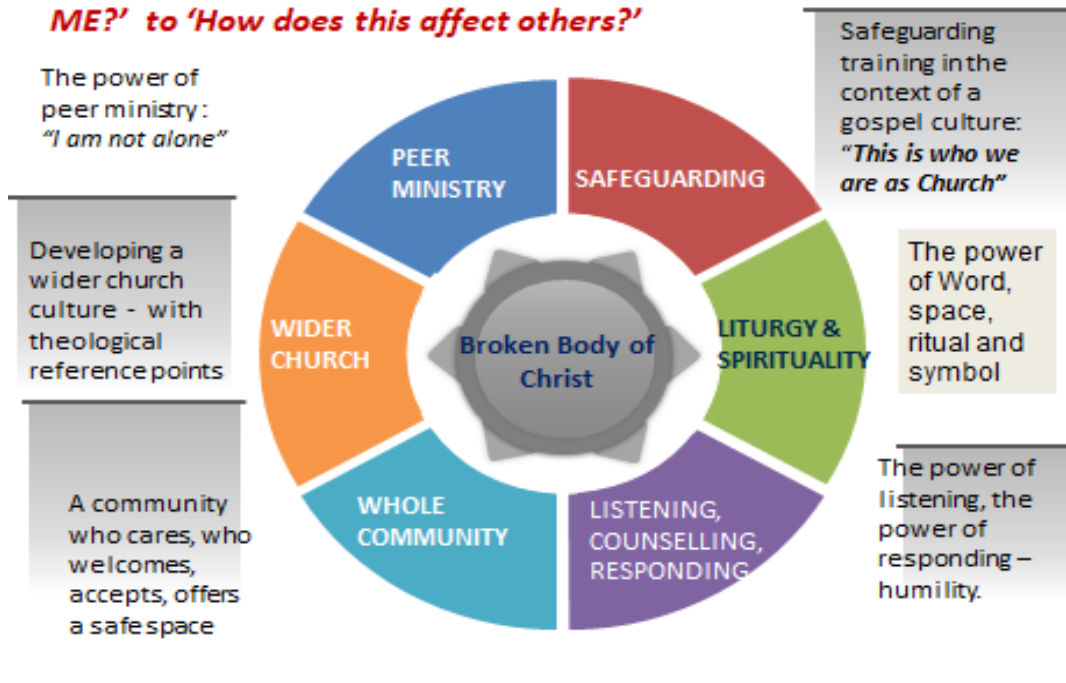
1. Support and peer support for victim/survivor at the heart, a continuing journey.
2. Support and peer support for families of victims/survivors.
3. Support for parish communities living through aftermath of abuse situation.
4. Resourcing of parishes wishing to engage in support of victims/families and communities.
5. Resourcing the re-shaping of wider church culture.

² Ibid Letter to the People of God August 2018 (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 228)



3.4 Accompanying the journey with victims /survivors at the centre

Shifting/expanding mindsets – from ‘How does this affect ME?’ to ‘How does this affect others?’



In considering Project 1 (spiritually resourcing and accompanying the journey of victims/survivors, with others, towards a more hopeful future) LBH members recognised that:

- I. **LBH does not work in isolation** – there is a narrative going on in the experience of each area in the diagrams.
- II. **There are further voices** to bring together in the life of each diocesan and parish community – safeguarding, counselling, spiritual direction, listening, peer ministry, liturgy, whole-community life, wider church culture.
- III. **An ongoing question** in so far as LBH is helping to address the needs of those hurt by abuse who continue to have a faith, but what about those who no longer see the Church as a safe place for them or have lost their faith?
- IV. **Membership of LBH** reflects wide experience and networks to draw on.
- V. **The group is very aware that all voices together** will need to continue to address the issues of clergy morale, and clergy formation for confident response and accountability, and would ask the question of all concerned, ‘How does spirituality speak into this issue?’
- VI. **LBH members were also aware of the complex question** of how to work with the perpetrator of abuse, and that a theological dynamic is part of this too. There are many with experience in this field working to engage the perpetrator of abuse in a process of living an accountable life that should not in any way impact negatively on survivors. However the perpetrator is not the focus of LBH. The absolute priority for LBH is to focus on the needs of the victim, listening to victims and together with them finding ways to move towards restorative justice and healing.³ We hope this would be part of a national forum space for discussion and research, and reflection on experience of practice.

3.5 Project 1: Some practical outcomes

Examples of LBH’s practical work in resourcing and supporting the spiritual and pastoral accompaniment of victims/survivors, their families and affected communities:

(i) **For the National Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse 2019** the development team of LBH (CBCEW Liturgy Office, MFL team, & Spirituality Committee) worked on resources⁴ <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/day-of-prayer-for-survivors-of-abuse-12-april-2019>

³ E.g. Insights from Rwanda, a Societas paper, ‘Remember in Action: Liturgy and Healing of Hurt Memories’ 2019

⁴ These resources were prepared by the Liturgy Office and the Marriage and Family Life Team of the Bishops’ Conference with assistance from Wellsprings [<http://www.wellsprings.org.uk>]. Other material and layout © 2019 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales.

(ii) **For the National Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse in 2020** the key resources from LBH were (i) a liturgy written by Survivors, used as a deanery focus for prayer, awareness and honesty. The Bishops used parts of this service when they met together in Valladolid in May 2019, to listen to, and learn from the experiences of survivors of abuse. (ii) A Mass for Survivors. The Day of Prayer resources had accompanying guidelines, including the role of listeners, and linked to the SAP leaflets on listening to survivors of abuse, some additional resources, and a link back to 2019 for further resources.

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/previous-events/days-of-prayer/day-of-prayer-abuse-survivors-2020/>⁵

(iii) **Supported by SAP, CSAS and NCSC, LBH submitted a proposal** to the Bishops' Plenary Meeting, Easter 2020, for creating an 'National Awareness Week' to replace a National Day of Prayer, and enable more flexibility for parishes to make use of time and resources. The group also made a proposal inspired by survivors, **to move the National Prayer** event away from the last Friday in Lent into the Easter Season. The Bishops rejected the proposal for an 'Awareness Week', but approved the change of day, **and from 2021, the National Day will be Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter.**

3.6 Project 2: Towards a spirituality of Safeguarding – Safeguarding as ministry

"We should stay with victims/survivors, and allow them to change us! ... I have been receiving spiritual healing and my spiritual development is on-going. I know I have a place in the Church, and I feel welcome. What I should have received as a child I am receiving now. As the Gospel says, we should all become as little children – the inner child healed. Children need and should be assisted to achieve their own spirituality."

A Survivor

(i) New Safeguarding training modules. LBH Project 2 concerns making a contribution to a renewed 'culture of safeguarding' recognising safeguarding as a 'ministry' central to the life and mission of the Church. The policies and procedures for safeguarding in a Catholic setting are rooted in our faith and belief and the living out of Gospel values and Church teaching. However, this needs to be made explicit. A spiritual-theological framework for safeguarding training will help all Catholics, including parish safeguarding representatives and others in positions of service in the church to understand safeguarding as 'ministry', and to connect to victims and survivors of abuse from a faith perspective as people of dignity, created

⁵ These Resources were put together by the Let's be Honest Working Group of the Bishops' Conference © 2020 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

in the image of God, and members of the Body of Christ, taking to heart that when one member hurts, the whole body is affected, and all are responsible for the pathway to healing.

The Safeguarding Coordinator member of LBH arranged for LBH members to undertake a number of Educare (now TES) modules used for safeguarding training in the dioceses. LBH members were then able to work on preparation of two modules, in the 'Educare style' that people were familiar with, and through these, to offer a theological and pastoral foundation for the formation of safeguarding coordinators, representatives, and others in dioceses, parishes, religious communities and organisations. It is felt that there could be merit in these being the first modules to be followed in any Catholic safeguarding training programme.

The LBH modules are:

- 1. Safeguarding Rooted in the Gospel:** spiritual and theological foundations in our Catholic faith, belief and practice that give us our mission, inspiring and guiding the life and ministry of the Church. As people of God, made in God's image, we are created for love to be 'creators of love' in the world. Our identity as Christians is to choose and give life – a life built on love that calls us to protect and keep safe every single person.
"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10.10 We have fallen short of this ideal and need to heal the damage that has been done. Safeguarding as ministry.
- 2. Understanding the Impact of Abuse on Victim/Survivors.** Keeping the victim/survivor at the centre of all we learn, the second module listens to the physical, emotional and spiritual impact of abuse, and connects with scriptural and theological understandings of the human person, the integral nature of spiritual and human development, the mystery of the child and child-like, the rupture caused by abuse, and what needs to be done.
- 3. Note: Further modules** are being considered, e.g. **What is Spiritual Abuse?** Who are the perpetrators and where does it happen? What are the key characteristics of spiritual abuse - a form of emotional and psychological abuse, characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context? Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact. Holding a theological position is not 'spiritually abusive' – but misuse of scripture, theology, doctrine is often a component of spiritually abusive behaviour. More thought and response must be given to the question **"How can we support the many victims/survivors who no longer see the Church as a safe place for them or have lost their faith?"**
- 4. An LBH training/formation resource has been prepared as part of 'The God Who Speaks' initiative.** This is a scripture-based resource using a choice of three gospel accounts with accompanying images. As an alternative to the 'Educare-style modules,

The God Who Speaks resource is for use as part of a safeguarding training event, offering a spiritual lens or approach through which to see the issue of abuse. The process aims to engage the safeguarding representatives in a diocese, pastoral councils or any groups in parishes, in reflection on the voice of God in scripture, alongside the voices of survivors of abuse, and to consider how the Word of God speaks to them about the abuse crisis. This biblical resource aims to underline the shared responsibility of all for creating a safe environment for children /adults vulnerable to abuse, and for the healing of those who have been abused. It affirms that training is vital both in policies and procedures, and in the theological and spiritual foundations that underpin a faith-based response to safeguarding. The resource is being piloted in Autumn 2020 in cooperation with Boundary Breaking and Diocesan Spirituality Representatives.

4. Conclusion

In summary, in its first year, the LBH group has been concerned with two strands of pastoral accompaniment – resourcing prayer/opportunities for encounter and healing, and formation in safeguarding that is rooted in the Gospel and Church teaching. LBH members recognise that these strands of pastoral accompaniment, running in parallel with safeguarding policies and procedures, need to be strong. They require a real investment in relationships, with survivors, families, members of the Church, and all who have authority and responsibility in influencing change in minds and hearts.

Members agree that we as Church need to be Christ-like in meeting Christ in survivors and victims of abuse: to 'be there', to 'stand with' victims, and to move with them when they are ready to move, at their pace, a commitment for as long as it takes, towards finding peace.

- The *Let's Be Honest* Group has drawn together representation of survivors of abuse, diocesan Safeguarding Coordinators, members of Conference of Religious, and others with experience of formation in spirituality, liturgy and theology.
- The core principle for LBH work remains founded on our co-responsibility as 'Church' to listening to and being guided in its ministry by the voice of survivors, enabling survivors to make decisions and be in control of their steps.
- LBH is a forum for the exchange of ideas and the development and sharing of resources to further the ministry of safeguarding and pastoral accompaniment. It has proved to be one way of reaching out to organisations and individuals working in both academic research, and in safeguarding and pastoral ministry, and collaborating in the national conversation.
- Practically, it has worked to provide materials for use at parish, organisation and national levels.

At the end of its first year of operation, the Group is deeply aware of the wider work that remains to be done, in creating a safe environment for children and others vulnerable to abuse, and to explore what a 'good' response might look and feel like for a survivor. LBH wishes to continue to build relationships with those who share their mission to strengthen the Church's response to the victims and survivors of abuse, and is grateful for the wisdom and kindness of every encounter this year, especially those with survivors of abuse, without whom the journey to healing for the Church would not be real or possible.

Members of the Let's Be Honest Group

14 September 2020

Our Survivor members of LBH have the last word:

"As a survivor of serious & sustained clerical abuse I feel as though there is a deep scar covering but not protecting, the deep searing pain that comes from a wound that lies beneath. It never really goes away. It is always there. Superficially things look fine; the reality is not visible. My experience would not be unique. Through LBH, I feel the Church is opening up to an aspect of this pain that has so far been ignored or possibly not even realised, viz. the spiritual dimension. Being a member of LBH is both a privilege & a challenge. I am amazed at what has been achieved during this first year & am convinced of the healing value of this work. As Pope Francis asked, victims & survivors are the priority in all our deliberations; Christ is at its heart."

"The importance of the spiritual pain can never be emphasised enough. There is a constant need of healing and help from each other. This is the mission of the Church, even if others don't want to, or are too scared to approach the subject. At the heart of the church is the vision of 'family' - family pain is in need of that help and companionship. As family, the Church needs to be encouraged to heal from within. Abuse, whether once or over many years, is the root of that person's brokenness. We in LBH and beyond can be the starting point for that spiritual and emotional care. This is 'vocation' in the true sense."

"It is good to see that the church is beginning to recognise the spiritual damage caused by abuse. But so much more needs to be done. LBH has made a great start into helping survivors, in particular by listening to them."

"Why has this not happened before? It cannot stop here. We need to continue this help and support for our families, we need to face this pain and grow from it."

A Survivor speaking at an LBH evening in the Diocese of Hallam