



**A lasting legacy  
RCNI Submission  
to  
the Memorial Committee for  
Survivors of Abuse**

**February 15th 2010**

## RCNI Submission to the Memorial Committee for Survivors of Abuse

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is the national representative body for Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland. The RCNI role includes the development and coordination of national projects, supporting Rape Crisis Centres to reach quality assurance standards, using our expertise to influence national policy and social change. The RCNI is a national information and resource centre on all aspects of sexual violence, with a proven capacity in strategic leadership including contributing and advising on the necessary infrastructure for a national response to all aspects of sexual violence.

The RCNI welcome this opportunity to submit to this committee our advice and expertise on the two questions raised.

### 1. Location and Nature of the memorial to be commissioned

The RCNI strongly support the recommendation in the **Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report (the Ryan Report)** to establish a physical memorial *'to the victims of abuse [past and present] in institutions as a permanent public acknowledgment of their experiences'*, of the institutional care system in Ireland.

The RCNI consider it important that this memorial should:

- a. Not be confined in location to Dublin
- b. be of a permanent physical nature to stand testimony over time
- c. Carry a formal acknowledgement by the State of the truths of the lives and experiences of survivors. The great feat encapsulated in the Ryan Report was that a truth, around which the Irish State, institutions, authorities and the public were silent, was finally heard and seen. This memorial should strive to return us to that truth; to work to ensure that the truth revealed by the efforts of survivors of those institutions and their supporters, cannot be obscured again in the future.
- d. Remember all children committed to institutions.

### 2. A national day of remembrance and solidarity

**Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) propose a National Children's Day be celebrated annually to serve as a legacy to the survivors of childhood abuse in institutional care, to help remind us of our duty to protect, care for and celebrate childhood.**

#### A National Children's Day

**Remembrance and Solidarity:** It is vital that a cornerstone of the children's day should be a remembrance and renewed acknowledgement of how we failed children in the past. This solidarity with survivors today will serve to remind us that our duty to child protection cannot be taken for granted. The memorial could act as a focus for this remembrance. This remembrance should serve to remind us of the debt of gratitude we owe to survivors for their contributions towards better childhoods for today and future generations of children, than they themselves were sadly afforded.

### A National Children's Day would consist of actions to:

- a. **celebrate childhood**
- b. **audit child protection practice and standards:** in the immediate future this may focus on auditing the full implementation of the 99 points of action arising from the Ryan Report and the plight of children in care today. On an annual basis this might include a government report on the welfare and happiness of children in Ireland along with shadow reports such as the current Children's Rights Alliance's annual Report Card.
- c. **ensure the prioritisation of children at all levels,** this may focus in the immediate future on the adequate resourcing of child protection services and the status of the child in our Constitution
- d. **Honour children's champions**

**When:** We would suggest the 1<sup>st</sup> of June as the national Children's day as this is the international children's day celebrated in many countries in the world. In addition many models are available to determine how best to structure a children's day which balance accountability and transparency with celebration and all things childlike.

**Sustainability:** it is vital that the legacy of survivors and their efforts is sustained into the future. The lessons identified in the Ryan Report remain relevant for today and into the foreseeable future. This is an important reason why the RCNI recommend the national children's day should focus on children in Ireland today and into the future.

Secondly, a National Children's Day would be open to participation by everyone in society. Organisations, institutions, groups and individuals would have scope to participate, restricted only by their imaginations. Such national participation and ownership would make for an energised, enthusiastic and sustainable event.

### RCNI learning and expertise informing our recommendation:

The failings of Church and State to properly honour children has resulted in a prolonged and protracted public debate, where many survivors felt they had no option but to go public about the details of the abuse they suffered in order to appeal for responsibility to be taken. Many survivors, whether they were actively vocal or silently witnessing it, have found this process cathartic, empowering and healing but also at times, re-traumatising, wounding and deeply saddening.

As a direct result of the publishing of the Ryan Report and to a lesser extent the Murphy report and the public attention both received in 2009, Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) throughout Ireland were contacted by many survivors.

Many of these survivors were making contact with Rape Crisis Centres for the first time, others were current clients, yet others were survivors who had previously ceased contact with the service, but were now returning for support as they are struggling to cope with hearing about this abuse. Those survivors, responding to the revelations and reaching out for support were survivors of all forms of abuse, not only those abused within institutions.

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Many survivors felt overwhelmed. Sadly some survivors could not cope and took their own lives.

Members of the public were also contacting RCCs, asking if there is anything they could do – they also felt distressed and powerless.

What survivors tell us they want and what the Rape Crisis sector has learnt over 30 years of building expertise on this issue, is that they want to live their lives free of the abuse they suffered and free of the negative impact those abuses may be having on their lives. An important step in what is often a healing process for a survivor is to be listened to and believed. That vindication is pursued on behalf of the victim in acknowledgement of the wrong that was committed against them, is also important.

The combination of:

- the Investigation into Institutional Abuse,
- the reporting of and public acknowledgement of same,
- the full reparation by the religious orders,
- the full implementation of the Minister for Children's 99 points of action arising from the Ryan Report and
- the full exhaustion of the legal process in all cases with regard to survivor wishes,

constitutes that listening, believing and vindicating of survivors. Many of these actions are ongoing and may take some years to complete. Many additional actions in responding to sexual violence are necessary and we will continue to build towards those changes.

It is therefore the RCNI's conclusion that the National Children's day should seek to add positively to the response to the Ryan Report rather than reiterate actions already being undertaken.

This is why the RCNI seek to build the national children's day as a celebration and a lasting positive legacy focusing on the present and future. Those constituting this national day should be mindful not to allow this day to simply replicate past trauma but rather to use the momentum gained by revelations of the trauma suffered by victims and the courage of these survivors who helped bring these to light, to build a better future.

This children's day would be a legacy to those survivors which will act as an annual day of awareness to audit our duty to protect, care for and celebrate childhood. This would be in addition to the measures needed to ensure responsibility, accountability, reparation and justice.

The children of abuse had their childhood taken from them, we cannot return those childhoods but we can make reparations for the past by honouring and celebrating childhood as a commitment never to let this happen again.

**Rape Crisis Network Ireland  
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