

Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill Adopt NI – Case evidence with complexities of access to records

Supplementary evidence following our attendance at Committee hearing on 24th September. We hope that this information and case evidence will help inform the consultation. Please note that Adopt NI are submitting a separate response collated by our service users and some of the below should complement some of the points made by our service users.

Information Recovery and Access to Records

Within Adopt NI's information recovery service sits four distinct yet interconnected services.

- Access to records
- Standard Tracing
- DNA Tracing
- DNA Project

Access to records can be internal and external, our Advocacy and Tracing Caseworkers will often liaise on behalf of Victims and Survivors to access their adoption/care file within the Health and Social Care Trusts, and other agencies for records pertaining to their time spent in institutions. Adopt NI have a good long-standing working relationships with the HSCT and voluntary adoption agencies in NI.

Information recovery is not siloed into just accessing records, it is interlinked with tracing and genealogy, to compliment the information recovery process and often confirm or refute information.

Changes since the (DoH) Access to Adoption Records Practice guidance mean adopted adults can now receive a redacted copy of their adoption file with fuller information than previously offered historically. However, quite often there are 'pockets' of

information across several agencies or institutions. Those familial separations that did not result in adoption, add further complexity for those accessing records for either themselves or on behalf of a loved one. Birth Mothers' may also now receive information relating to them in the statutory adoption file but will face the same issues in what is available, and what can or will be provided from other institutional records. Currently, descendants of those affected are unentitled to any information from the statutory adoption file, and subsequently most institutions will not release records under GDPR to descendants.

In relation to MBMLW, our Advocacy and Tracing Caseworkers consistently work in tandem with our Genealogists on information recovery. For example, those individuals who are Foundlings, Orphans, have illegal birth registration or only birth mothers name and townland, have little information to work with and therefore require collaborative input. This adds value to information recovery for both inquiry and redress purposes (see case study and illustration below).

Case Study:

Information recovery re birth mother. Our client was raised in a children's institution for 18 years and never knew their birth mum. Client had been in touch with the institution, priests and agency representing institution over the years trying to find information about their birth mum and had never been able to find any. At time of referral client only knew their birth mums name and townland birth as these were listed on her own birth certificate.

Outcome:

- Records confirming birth mother believed to have spent 57 years in Good Shepherds care post client's birth
- Grave located
- Birth mother's full family history and tree provided to client.
- Sibling located and successful intermediary provided.

Advocacy Access to Records

Applied to agency representing Good Shepherds records with birth mums name and clients name and DOB to see if any records held re mother & baby homes- No records found.

Applied to PRONI to see if any records held re Workhouse births or Local Authority Welfare minutes- records located confirming client born in Workhouse and remained there with birth mum for several months. Date of exit matches clients date of entry into children's institution as a baby.

Re-applied to agency representing Good Shepherd's records re St Mary's Laundry. No records found.

Request from genealogist to contact PRONI for any evidence to place birth mother in specific county in NI as potentially death record located for birth mum advising place of death, and Good Shepherd's listed as collecting body. Records confirmed home address of birth mother pre clients birth. Records located from ration registers confirming location of birth mother at time.

Re-applied to agency representing Good Shepherd's records re St Mary's Laundry. Records eventually located confirming birth mum admitted to laundry for 17 years post birth. Dates matched clients years spent in children's institution.

Further request made for Good Shepherds records through their solicitor- Records received confirming birth mother still in their care at time of St Marys closure and moved to Good Shepherds residential home then nursing care.

Genealogy

Checked birth records for sibling births- Tracing offered- sibling found and successfully traced with intermediary ongoing

- Checked birth records for birth mothers birth certificate-located
- Checked death records- no death record located with DOB. Given birth mothers age now she will be deceased.
- Checked marriage records- birth mother never married

Potential death record located- DOB close but not exact. DOB linked to real birth, confirmed through genealogy this person died and is buried in another country.

Burial record located for this DOB- Good Shepherds graveyard. Plot and grave stone located.

Request made to Advocate to locate records placing birth mother in specific NI county to help verify this information.

The case study above illustrates that our client may be eligible to claim posthumously for their Mother, who was admitted to a (listed) laundry while pregnant. The adult who was brought up in institutional care as a result of the familial separation, would not be eligible under the current proposed list of institutions.

Adopt NI feedback on the Bill in general – scope and limitations

We noted from other evidence sessions, questions from the committee around eligible institutions, pathways and practices and lists of the same. We wish to highlight the stats for those currently engaging with Adopt NI; their institution or pathway, to highlight the need for a wider lens to be used when examining the institutions. We recognise that it is impossible within this inquiry to examine the adoption and care system as a whole, however we do feel it important to not silo the named institutions without examining the systemic pathways and practices in and out of the institutions and those coerced familial separations. Mothers were coerced into separation from their children and endured lifelong stigmatisation. The wider system of gender discrimination needs to be addressed and visible within the bill.

Within a cohort of almost 300 MBMLW service users in Adopt NI since late 2022, currently:

20% are from workhouses (born to a Mother there)

8% are from Nazareth McCormick et al (2021) listed institutions researched and suggested many for further consideration:

Researched:

- Belfast Midnight Mission maternity Home
- Malone Place
- Mount Oriel
- Deanery Flats
- Good Shepherd Laundries
- Workhouses (*NB: McCormick et al discuss the close relationship between the Belfast Workhouse and Mother & Baby homes, under the auspices of the workhouse board of guardians. While this illustrates a small sample analysis, McCormick et al suggest records of all Poor Law Unions should be examined.*)

Proposed:

- St Joseph's Baby Home
- Nazareth Homes Derry / Portadown / Newry

- Our Mother of Mercy Newry
- Thorndale
- Hopedene
- Barnardo's Ballycastle
- Glendhu Belfast
- Coleshill Enniskillen
- Coney warren Omagh
- Clogrennan Larne
- DhuVarren Portrush
- Gleneyre Portadown

In addition, The Independent Panel were also investigating the following pathways and practices:

- the care system, fostering and adoption practices,
- related institutions such as 'baby homes',
- private nursing homes, and;
- cross-border and international transfers of women and children.

During the course of their work, the Independent Panel identified other establishments including private nursing homes or private family domestic homes or residences where the child and mother were forcibly separated after birth:

- Antrim House Nursing Home, 60 Cliftonville Road, Belfast
- Ardenlee Nursing Home, 356, Ravenhill Road, Belfast
- Atholl Nursing Home, 106 Antrim Road, Belfast
- Bayview Nursing Home, 2 Bayview Terrace, Derry / Londonderry
- Glandore Nursing Home, 106 Antrim Road, Belfast
- Ivanhoe Nursing Home, 35 University Road, Belfast
- Lisieux Nursing Home, 68, Clifton Street, Belfast
- Rosemount Nursing Home, 124 Antrim Road, Belfast
- Windsor Nursing Home, 411 Lisburn Road, Belfast

Adopt NI are supporting many clients linked to the abovementioned pathways and practices, who currently do not see themselves within this Bill.

Focusing only on named institutions risks ignoring the systemic nature of the practices. Many survivors whose experiences are valid and relevant will be excluded as things stand, especially those linked to the baby homes, workhouses, and cross-border practices.