

Child abuse survivor suffered ‘intimidation’ after speaking out

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A child abuse survivor has said he suffered intimidation after speaking out and was forced to waive his anonymity after his convicted abuser appeared in a BBC documentary.

Giving evidence to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, David Whelan said he received abusive phone calls at his home after making allegations relating to Quarriers Children’s Village in Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire. John Porteous, who worked at the children’s home in the 1960s and 1970s, was jailed in 2002 for sex offences against two boys.

Mr Whelan, who leads the campaign group Former Boys and Girls Abused in Quarriers Homes (FBGA), yesterday told the inquiry that a 2003 BBC Frontline Scotland documentary, which featured Porteous, had been a “catalyst” which led him to waive his anonymity as an abuse victim. In the documentary, entitled Secrets and Lies, doubt was cast on Porteous’s convictions.

Giving evidence before Lady Smith yesterday, Mr Whelan said: “What happened after the trial of my abuser was that there was media stories saying that we had lied in court. That was in national media stories.

“Then there was a programme made called Secrets and Lies by BBC Frontline Scotland in 2003 which came out. There was a group of former residents involved. There was former directors involved. Obviously the person who was convicted was interviewed in prison.

“That really was the catalyst of us ... the court had given us anonymity; I would never have wanted to give that up, but I faced no choice because basically in a national programme it was being said I lied in a court of law.”

He added: “I have never lied in any of these processes and I want to put that on the record.”

Mr Whelan, one of five siblings, was in Quarriers’ care between 1969 and 1974 and was separated from his sister despite their being admitted at the same time.

He told the inquiry he later received an apology from the BBC for what he called “errors” in the programme, but said he did not believe it to be “sincere”.

The inquiry saw a submission from FBGA which showed it had represented 230 survivors at one point, and Mr Whelan said he regularly took phone calls from those struggling to come to terms with the abuse they had suffered.

Mr Whelan said he found it “astounding” that more staff had not been aware of the abuse at the time.

He said many survivors remained distrustful of the authorities and the inquiry itself due to the abuse they had endured as children.

He said: “There’s clearly mistrust of the systems, of the establishment, of the professionals because of what’s happened and this is based on people’s experiences.

“Survivors have been let down so much over many, many years that the trust has gone in many of them.

“I think it goes back to when you sort of try to report it originally as a child and you weren’t believed, what happened to you, what happened to maybe your sibling.”

The inquiry – which has cost £5.7 million to date and is due to report in 2019 – continues

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