

‘Sunday’ Programme

BBC Radio 4 - 28 January 2024

Transcript of interviews (starting at about 7.30 am)

William Crawley

The Church of England is facing renewed criticism following its decision to close its own Independent Safeguarding Board last year. At the time church authorities said they closed the Board in order to replace it with a more independent, more effective body. But some victims and survivors of abuse say that that decision, and the fact that victims were not told about it in advance, left them feeling abandoned, silenced, and re-traumatised. In a moment, I'll put those concerns to Dr Jamie Harrison, chair of the House of Laity in the Archbishops' Council. First, we hear from David Glasgow, a clinical psychologist who published his own report earlier this month, which chronicles the personal and emotional impact of the Board's disbandment on 12 survivors.

David Glasgow

I didn't know what I was going to find when I, when I began to speak with them. And some of them were not willing or able to communicate with me, but quite a few were. And I was very saddened and disturbed to discover just how negative the impact on them had been, and how much worse their post traumatic symptoms had become. One of the odd things about post-traumatic symptomology is that it really is very diverse, very heterogeneous, that different people are affected in very different ways. The sorts of things that they describe are what people commonly refer to as triggering, or flashbacks, and profound feelings of being disregarded, being set aside, feeling worthless, and feeling as though they're treated as being worthless, and not considered. Are we not important enough to be considered in this? Did they know how much this would hurt me?

William Crawley

David, what are you hoping your report will achieve?

David Glasgow

I felt that there was a clamour of voices that actually obscured the needs of victims, and the voices of victims. And so their voices were lost, their experiences were lost. And I have tried to draw together information that will mean that, going forward, there ought to be more consideration of how well their needs have been met in the past, and how they will be met in the future. So there is something really worth fighting for here. And the Church could be breaking new ground in meeting the needs of people who have been abused in the past.

William Crawley

Having just heard from David Glasgow, can I ask you, Dr. Harrison: before the decision to terminate contracts of remaining Independent Safeguarding Board members was taken, was any expert risk assessment carried out into the likely effect of all of that dismantling on victims and survivors?

Jamie Harrison

Thank you very much William. I, could I just apologise also to David for not responding to him earlier when he was in touch with the Church. And it's really good to have his report. To answer your question. I think the answer probably is, "no, we didn't get the level of expertise we needed." And that's something which we're very saddened by. And the effects, which David has very carefully and systematically told us about, are there. And that's a tragedy for us, and more so for them.

William Crawley

So no risk assessment was carried out.

Jamie Harrison

I think it depends what you mean by risk assessment, I say there was probably no formal risk assessment in the way that David has put it. And I don't, we did try to involve a survivor at one point in our conversations, but I would suggest that the risk assessment was inadequate.

William Crawley

You've got real issues of trust here being voiced in this report that we have from David Glasgow, because you've got some victims and survivors, saying, for example, let me quote one, of the Independent Board, "they are independent until they say something that the Church doesn't like, and then they're sacked or moved", and another says, "after what they've done, why should we believe people who are telling us to trust them, when they're really nothing more than sock puppets?"

Jamie Harrison

Yeah, I mean, absolutely valid. Erm, as you know, William, it's only by being...

William Crawley

They are sock puppets are they?

Jamie Harrison

Well, no. What I think I'm saying is that to be trusted, you have to be trustworthy. And we have lacked that level of trustworthiness in the last efforts in this area. And we have to regain that by being trustworthy, which means to engage victims and survivors, and to set up a board, whatever it is, through Alexis Jay's work, that is truly independent. The problem always with the ISB, that what the first iteration of the ISB was, it was never fully independent from the Church. And that cannot be the situation in the future. What we call the 'ISB two', which we'd hoped ISB one could help us to develop, and was not perhaps doing that as quickly as we'd hoped. As long as we begin to move to that with the advice of Alexis Jay and her team, and that report will come out next month.

William Crawley

After decades of reporting about institutional abuse, sexual and physical abuse, within Church contexts, here we are in the 21st century with this level of incompetence in the judgement of many victims and survivors. Basic issues like taking an interest in the risk assessment around the traumatic impact on victims of decisions that are taken, involving victims and survivors in the processes that are meant to be giving them justice. These are pretty rudimentary and elementary mistakes to be making at this point, aren't they?

Jamie Harrison

I can't disagree with you. All I can say is we have to, I think there needs to be a sea change in our thinking. I think what I've discovered having done the trauma-informed training recently is that I was ignorant in that area. And we've committed as a Archbishops' Council for all to be trained in that. And we would expect and hope that all members of General Synod might have that training. But only through that sort of training and engagement can we begin to understand better, both our failings but, more importantly, the way ahead - how we can construct the sort of system you're describing, which will not have the hazards and failures of the past.

William Crawley

David, you're listening to Dr. Harrison there: anything you'd like to put to him?

David Glasgow

The thing that really strikes me is that the victims now are in a worse position than they were when they embarked on this process. So there, I think there has to be some kind of remedial work to actively repair relationships and repair trust.

William Crawley

Just a final word from Jimmy Harrison on that: remedial measures, not to deal simply with bureaucracy, but to deal with traumatised people who need help.

Jamie Harrison

Yes, I mean, I'm not going to disagree with David on that. We have got a system in place run by someone called Kevin Crompton, which is trying to respond to those who have been particularly traumatised and upset by the ISB process, and that is ongoing. And, of course, David's words are very wise and we need to hear them and work with them.

William Crawley

Canon Dr Jamie Harrison there from the Archbishops' Council, with an apparently open-handed acceptance that the Church has mishandled its safeguarding responsibilities relating to these victims and survivors. How will that be heard by those survivors? The Reverend Graham Sawyer is a survivor of abuse by the former Bishop of Gloucester, Peter Ball.

Graham Sawyer

Well, it's breathtakingly shallow, and shameless. And, whilst I'm not a spokesman for the other 11 people who were affected by the brutal, sudden, abolition of the Independent Safeguarding Board, all I can say is that I simply don't believe what I'm hearing. Why should we trust these people who have become so

shamelessly cruel, that they don't seem to have any depths of decency whatsoever? Why should we trust them after all that they have done and continue to do?

William Crawley

In some of your communication with Church figures you've drawn an analogy with the Post Office scandal. Explain that, would you?

Graham Sawyer

Both organisations have been headed by Church of England clergy. Significant harm has been done to many victims. However, there is no accountability whatsoever. The two organisations seem to have been run, in terms of management, by corrupt courtiers. The people who have suffered most are wholly innocent, if not wholly innocents, and the end doesn't seem to be in sight for all those who have suffered so much already.

William Crawley

What needs to be done for you to restore trust? I mean, do you have any faith in the Jay review?

Graham Sawyer

Well, the last time that Professor Jay headed an independent inquiry, which lasted seven years, the result was that the government ignored it and pretty much nothing has happened. I suspect that the Church of England will probably do the same. You know, we have so many reviews, inquiries, where the terms of reference are written solely by the secretariat of the Church of England; lessons learned reviews: nothing changes. Nothing will with the people leading the Church of England at the moment. We talk about the Post Office, but perhaps a better analogy would be with the *News of the World* newspaper, which quite rightly was closed down. As a result of so many failings and lack of confidence as a result. It seems that the Church of England is a sort of ecclesiastical version of the *News of the World*.

William Crawley

And just finally, Graham. The impact on victims and survivors of that disbandment of the Independent Safeguarding Board: what was the effect on you?

Graham Sawyer

Well, I wasn't surprised. I was shocked. My immediate thought was, the other people who are going to be affected. And I know that in our group of 12—we meet quite regularly by the way—some of our group attempted suicide. Some certainly had suicidal thoughts. Some were made physically and mentally very ill indeed. Having made that leap of faith and trust in the Church of England, after so many years of abuse, to have that was the final straw. So I'm afraid what Dr Jamie Harrison says about re-establishing trust: sorry, mate, it's just too late. Know that it's time to go, along with all the other people on the Archbishops' Council and those running so disastrously safeguarding in the Church of England.

William Crawley

The Reverend Graham Sawyer.