

Counselling vital for victims

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Even as he delivered a statement highlighting his report, Cornwall Inquiry Commissioner Normand Glaude said he found it "troubling" the Government of Ontario appears to have decided to stop counselling services for sexual abuse survivors.

"I hope they reconsider," Glaude said to a packed hotel ballroom on Tuesday. "Making decisions without consultation or reconsideration of the views of sexual abuse survivors is an unwelcome echo of the institutional failures that brought us here today."

According to the report, which concluded the response of institutions to allegations of historical abuse was "in large part inadequate," counselling support is set to expire 90 days after the report's release.

Glaude called the counselling provided by the Inquiry's Healing and Reconciliation (known as Phase 2) mandate to foster an environment of healing and reconciliation for the victims in historical sexual abuse cases "unprecedented."

"This Inquiry broke new ground in creating counselling support and witness support programs," Glaude said. "Some 388 individuals have been to counselling with the counsellor of their choice through funding provided by this inquiry. This practical help has changed lives -it may even have saved lives."

Because many of those people have not completed their counselling, Glaude recommended the province fund a five-year, \$5 million "Reconciliation Trust" for Cornwall and the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry that could support initiatives to support survivors, prevention of abuse, training, education, awareness and recognition.

Glaude estimated 150 people were still in counselling, and that over the next five years that number would drop to "no more than 40 people."

Rejean W. Vigarars is one of those victims still in counselling

"We're looking for a bit of an extension," Vigarars said. "I hope we're going to get it. The judge did an excellent job. All we're hoping for now is that the government does its share and enacts a lot of these recommendations."

If counselling services were to change because the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General doesn't continue to support Phase 2, Vigarars said all of the counselling he has received to date will be wasted.

"We don't want to go to somebody new. I won't go to somebody new," he said. "It would be just as bad as starting all over again. A continuation of what we have; whatever they can afford is fine by me."

Vigarars believes maintaining counselling services as they are will ultimately keep the amount of time victims require counselling down.

Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall Bishop Paul-Andre Durocher was the only representative of an institution who volunteered to make a statement following Glaude's statement.

Vigarars summed up his response to Durocher's formal apology for abuse by Catholic priests as "relief."

"I thought it was from the heart," he said. "I shook his hand and I thanked him for it. It's something I've been looking forward to for quite some time."

Vigarars says he was abused in 1957 by a priest who victimized several others by moving around.

"If some of these recommendations had been in effect at that time, me and others would not have been at the mercy of that man. He's definitely not an attribute [sic] to the Catholic church. He's definitely satanic."

Glaude also recommended the province fund: a Family and Child Advocacy Centre in Cornwall to the tune of \$2.8 million; an Adult Community Healing Resource Centre for \$650,000; one-time funding for a Centre for Excellence for Applied Education in the Prevention, Treatment and Community Support of Children, Youth and Adults and a five-year lecture series for local professionals; \$300,000 worth of funding over three to four years for PrevAction (a local group that coordinates the support efforts of various organizations to make the community safer for children); creation of a new counsellor position at Cornwall Community Hospital and funding for an existing hospital-based abuse prevention program.

PrevAction chairman Richard Allaire called the recommendations "fair, sound and achievable," but added the group is concerned about how much funding the province will provide.

Vigarars said he is, overall, happy about the results of the inquiry despite the hefty price tag of approximately \$50 million he figures many complain about, but he sees it as a small price to pay if Glaude's recommendations influence policy across the province and, he hopes, all over Canada.

Colleen Parrish, director of Phase 2, said the recommendations from Glaude are very much "Made for Cornwall" solutions.

The Family and Child Advocacy Centre, for example, has the support of the Cornwall Community Police Service and the Children's Aid Society of the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry.

"When you're a child and you're taken to the police station, what do you think?" Parrish said. "You think you've done something wrong. So the idea is to create a different environment, an environment that is much more likely to facilitate disclosure in a comfortable way for kids and also support the family, because when it is pretty devastating when it's your child. And also have a place for adult survivors to go that feels supportive and helpful."

Other service providers such as the police would visit the centre to aid the victims, while the centre would refer victims to existing services such as the Children's Treatment Centre.

"You wouldn't replicate what the Children's Treatment Centre is doing because they are doing a fabulous job," Parrish said. "But you make that connection."

Parrish said the 800 child advocacy centres already established in the U. S. have been "extremely successful."

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