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### GRACE FILES

# Grace: 20 years of horror

Grace returned to foster home after hospital saw her for bruising on thighs and breasts

Daniel McConnell and Fíachra O Cionnait

The full horror and torment suffered by 'Grace', the person at the heart of the foster care sex abuse scandal over a 20-year period, is revealed today.

Grace, the intellectually disabled child, who is now in her 40s, was sent back to the foster home she was abused in after she was hospitalised for bruising on her thighs and breasts because of confusion over what to do with her.

This is just one of a litany of abuse incidents and catastrophic failures by health officials detailed in two reports to be published today. Their publication has been delayed by up to five years.

They include allegations that another resident at the home was locked in a cupboard under the stairs.

The details of these two reports are revealed in today's Irish Examiner.

Last night, former Public Accounts Committee chairman John McGuinness who, along with TD John Deasy, led the charge to expose the scandal, called for a full public inquiry into what he called the "cover up" of the abuse by senior health officials.

The 2012 *Conal Devine Report* and the *Resilience Ireland Report* into the foster abuse scandal reveal Grace suffered significant physical injuries before being removed from the home in 2009. The two reports are due to be published today.

The injuries include black eyes, bruises to limbs, and carpet burns on her back, while she also suffered horrendous neglect in terms of her physical condition.

The *Devine Report* details how an original 1996 decision to remove Grace from the home, amid allegations of sexual abuse, was overturned following representations of the then health minister Michael Noonan.

It shows that a separate allegation of "sexual molestation" against a second child in 1995 was not

properly investigated because of the absence of a formal complaint to gardai.

The report details how Grace would begin stripping off her clothes in front of her day carers or on the bus from the foster home. It has transpired that she would do so on foot of a particular word or phrase being uttered.

The report found that, despite mounting concerns as to her safety, health officials could not agree what

course of action to take, and therefore she languished in the home at risk for years.

"The staff could not agree and it took longer than it should have for action to be taken," the report found.

In one of the most disturbing incidents on March 27, 2009, Grace was found by her day carers with bruises on her thighs and breasts. She was sent to hospital, where staff reported the bruising to the gardai and the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit.

The staff did not think it would be suitable for her to stay in hospital overnight.

Staff tried to find a different place for her to stay that night but there was confusion about what was available, the report states. Despite her injuries, she was returned to the foster home that night, which was considered the "least worst option".



John McGuinness: Has called for a full public inquiry.

The two reports have only been published after the Irish Examiner revealed

### Final Report



March 2012

that Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan had no objection to their publication. The HSE had for several years insisted that the reports could not be published because of warnings of damage to the gardai.

The Cabinet today is to discuss the two reports ahead of next week, when minister of state for disability issues Finian McGrath is expected to bring the terms of reference for the Commission of Inquiry into the Grace scandal for approval.

According to the memorandum for the Cabinet this morning, Mr McGrath said the minister is of "grave concern". "The minister intends to bring a memorandum to Government next week seeking the Government's agreement to the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry into the Grace scandal," the report states.

He said the five-year failure to publish the reports was "an exercise in delay", adding that the imminent commission of investigation into the case must name who is responsible and include a full examination of still unaddressed coverage of the reports.

The Resilience Ireland report, which will also be published today, said "potentially serious" cases involving other vulnerable adults also occurred at the home.

The report, which was drawn up in 2015 and focussed on the experiences of other people placed at the home, said a joint gardai and UK police investigation was launched into claims at least one other vulnerable child who now lives in Britain was seriously abused.

Speaking to the Irish Examiner, Mr McGuinness said "a public inquiry" is now needed into what happened.

He said the five-year failure to publish the reports was "an exercise in delay", adding that the imminent commission of investigation into the case must name who is responsible and include a full examination of still unaddressed coverage of the reports.

one accepts responsibility," said Mr McGuinness. "That's the headline for me. The two reports have details, but they are typical of how the HSE does its business."

"There is no doubt in my mind there has to be a public inquiry. Certainly, the allegation of a cover up hasn't been dealt with."

News: 6

## Bus Éireann to lose €500k per strike day

Elaíne Loughlin Political Reporter

Bus Éireann is set to lose €500,000 for every day that workers go out on strike, bringing it even closer to insolvency.

An all-out and indefinite strike is now set to halt the country's bus services from next Monday after Bus Éireann announced a raft of cuts and savings. The company has warned it could be insolvent by May and yesterday issued a letter to staff outlining 55 measures to keep the firm afloat. This includes axing three routes.

While commuters face chaos, it is expected employers will also be affected as many workers will have no way of getting to work without a bus. Bus Éireann, which lost €9.4m last year, also stands to suffer each day drivers and other workers take to the picket line.

A company spokeswoman confirmed it would lose €500,000 for every day that services are not running. This would include forfeiting €125,000 in State funding towards its public service obligations (PSO) routes during weekday strikes and around €75,000 per day if the strike continues over the weekend.

Writing to staff, Bus Éireann acting chief Ray Herenan said: "Operating losses at Bus Éireann increased to €1.5m in January, and if this run rate continues the company will be insolvent in May."

He said the company had "no option" but to implement changes to work practices that would result in "immediate cost saving".

National Bus and Rail Union general secretary Dermot O'Leary said Bus Éireann management was determined to "steer a course towards conflict".

He said the "far-reaching" measures, due to come into force from Monday, had forced them to call the strike.

News: 4

## Man in his 20s held over murder of farmer, 90

Conor Kane

A man in his 20s was being held overnight for questioning in connection with the death of 90-year-old farmer Paddy Lyons after gardai confirmed they are treating the death as murder.

A man arrested yesterday afternoon was detained at Waterford gardai station under section 4 of the 1964 Criminal Justice Act. The gardai inquiry into Mr Lyons' death was upgraded to a murder investigation following an autopsy.

Mr Lyons lived alone near Lisimore.



Gardai treating death of Paddy Lyons as murder.

News: 9

## 733 of 756 rental homes failed safety checks

Sean O'Riordan

A statutory inspection has revealed an alarmingly high number of private rented properties in Cork county were potential death traps.

A local authority report yesterday divulged 97% of 756 private properties inspected failed to meet regulatory standards. Many properties failed on basic life-saving installations such as smoke alarms, fire blankets and insufficient ventilation for open fires and solid fuel stoves.

Significantly, Cork County Council only has resources to inspect 5.1% of private rented housing stock.

A total of 733 of the 756 properties inspected showed breaches of basic safety legislation. Under regulations, all private properties have to be inspected at least once every four years.

Private landlords were charging huge prices but were failing "abysmally" to maintain standards, warned Sinn Féin councillor Des O'Grady. Mr O'Grady, who had sought to see the report, described the inspectors' findings as damning.

"I know there are some good landlords out there but many are failing abysmally," he said. "We need to contact Housing Minister Covey on this and get a proper inspection programme in place."

Independent councillor Noel Collins said he recently viewed properties for rent at €1,100 a month and described them "as unfit for human habitation".

"The scarcity of social housing is playing into the hands of unscrupulous landlords," he warned.

In 2015, 65% of these properties failed nationally but just 27 legal cases were taken. There's an enforcement black hole. Tenants are afraid of becoming homeless and, in most cases, won't challenge the landlord."

Council chief executive Tim Lucey said the council had the full-time equivalent of 2.4 people to conduct inspections. He said significant costs and resources were needed to reach the target of inspecting every rented house every four years.

A decision was made at the county council meeting to express members' concerns to Mr Covey.

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### News

Irish patients with blood cancer are the first worldwide to take part in a new drug trial to develop more effective treatment for multiple myeloma, a potentially fatal condition.

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### World

We were not able to get anything to eat, not even water — the entire environment is so parched. We found several bodies of children on the road.

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### Business

Berkshire Hathaway has increased its Apple stake to about 133m shares, says CEO Warren Buffett, more than twice as much as it held at the end of 2016.

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## Grace files

## We have reports but we need accountability, fast

**F**INALLY, finally, we have revealed the true and horrific scale of the sexual abuse and neglect which was allowed to befall an intellectually disabled child.

Put up for adoption, only to fall into the foster care system because of disability, she was left exposed to the most savage, disgusting, vile abuse for 20 years.

Despite allegations about the foster family back in the 1990s, Grace was left languishing in the home until 2009 when she was still suffering abuse.

Another girl, known as Ann, was allowed remain in the home until 2013, despite the authorities knowing about all of the allegations for years.

It is disgraceful. Today's publication of the Conal Devine report is not easy reading.

'Grace' was not just neglected by her abusers but let down by state personnel. We need to know who made the decision to leave Grace in an abusive home, who tried to cover this whole saga up, and how justice is to be achieved, says **Daniel McConnell**

From the specifics of the continual bruising and trauma suffered by Grace and others at the hands of her abusers to the calamitous and unforgivable failures of health officials to protect her at her most vulnerably simply beggars belief.

The Devine report, all 148 pages of it, obtained by the Irish Examiner, will finally

## Comment

be published today after repeated refusals by the HSE to do so.

They said they could not because the gardai told them they couldn't publish it and a second 2015 report into the details conducted by Resilience Ireland.

That line got blown out of the water last month when we reported on correspondence between TD John Deasy and Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan who said she had no issue in the reports being published.

But the Devine report, shows most importantly, just how badly the State, and people charged to act in its behalf, messed up and how Grace who is now almost 40, was left to pay an unimaginable price.

But just what are we dealing with here.

■ **Sexual abuse:** Grace would leave her foster home and at times would begin stripping off her clothes either without prompting or on the utterance of a particular phrase.

■ **Physical abuse:** Time and time again, Grace showed up with bruises, red marks on her back, black eyes, carpet



Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan said she had no issue in the Conal Devine and Resilience Ireland reports being published.

## Answers are needed in this case and fast

burns and many others.

■ **Financial abuse:** It is alleged and included in the Devine report that the foster mother who "looked after" Grace defrauded her of her monies over a time.

■ **Neglect:** The report details how Grace went years without seeing a GP,

she suffered poor dental care and her general appearance was in poor state.

But her neglect was not just at the hands of her abusers. For years the state personnel who were supposed to look after her simply forgot her. She vanished from their radar.

Even worse, in more recent times, Grace became lost in bureaucratic and legal disputes between different officers of the State who argued about what was best for her, all the while leaving her exposed to danger in the foster home.

Devine found that there was no clear record of decisions taken in relation to Grace.

He found that no one did anything about the concerns voiced by Grace's carers in the day centre.

The Devine report concludes there were failures in

the duty of care shown to her. That is a gross understatement.

She, and, as we know from the Resilience Ireland report, others who were abused at this foster home were abandoned and forgotten by the very State charged with protecting their wellbeing.

We already have had apologies from the HSE, even though they were mangled by officials last year.

But what we have not had yet is accountability or justice.

Who were the individuals who made the decision to leave her in the foster home despite the original decision to remove her?

Who are the ones who tried to cover this entire saga up, as has been claimed by the whistleblowers involved in this case.

Answers are needed in this case and fast.

A report published today opens the lid on the shocking abuse and neglect of a child and young adult left languishing in a foster care home, writes Political Editor **Daniel McConnell**



**I**T IS sickening what the young woman we have come to know as Grace was exposed to for so long.

Born in 1978 as the child of a single mother, Grace was originally put up for adoption, but because of her intellectual disability that fell through. So began a lifetime of neglect at the hands of the State.

Today finally sees the publication of a damning report, which was produced by the HSE in 2012, but has been kept under lock and key since.

The Conal Devine report details shocking abuse and neglect of a child and young adult who was left in the Waterford foster home for almost 14 years after allegations of abuse first surfaced.

The Irish Examiner has seen the report and publishes its findings here today.

## JUST WHO IS GRACE?

In 1989 when she was 11 years old, Grace moved to live with the foster family.

This foster family also looked after other children with disabilities, mostly for short breaks and holidays.

Grace lived with the foster family for 20 years from the age of 11 to 31.

"We think that she suffered abuse while living with this family," Devine and his team conclude.

The report reveals that her placement in 1989 in the foster home was supposed to be just a short-term placement.

The laws governing her care said there would be six-monthly reviews, but there were none.

"She stayed living with the foster family throughout the rest of her childhood.

**ABUSE**

In 1995, when Grace was 17, she started going to a day service.

"At this time she started showing signs of distress

## Analysis

through her behaviours. Staff reported that they saw bruises on her body," the report states.

But much worse emerged. In October 1985, while toileting, a large bruise was noticed on her left hip, appears to have been there for some time.

Ten days later an incident report stated that "for the first time in day care, Grace was completely 'herself' for no apparent reason". But the report goes on to reveal that a report from seven months previously also referred to bruising on Grace's body, bad behaviour, poor hygiene and her stripping off her clothes.

"Grace took to stripping off all her clothes both in the day and at the day centre," the report reveals.

"On several occasions when she was being bathed, bruising was noticeable on her body. These bruises were brought to the attention of the foster parents. They informed us they couldn't account for the bruises and said they must have happened when she was on the bus," adds the report.

In 1996, the mother of a different girl said her daughter had been "sexually molested" while being fostered by the same foster family.

This second allegation was never properly investigated by gardai because a copy of the complaint was not made.

Staff from the health services in the area met in April to discuss the situation of Grace. They said that she should move to a new home.

At the time the foster family said that they would appeal, and also that they needed time for the family to get used to the young woman leaving their home.

The foster family wrote to health service staff to appeal the decision to remove Grace from the home.

In August 1996, the foster family lost their appeal but wrote to their health minister, Michael Noonan, asking him to change the appeal decision.

This point is to be a matter of key importance to the pending commission of inquiry due to be announced next week.

Following Mr Noonan being lobbied, the Department of Health wrote to the local health service for information.

The report states, that local health service staff wrote back saying the case was under review.

Staff visited the foster home in September and recorded that the foster carers were against moving the young woman, it adds.

However, in October 1996, a review by a three-man panel took place which found that there was no evidence that anything happened to the young woman or that her welfare was not being met by the foster family.

It also found that no other children would be placed there.

The review panel concluded that the young woman would stay with the foster family, her day services placement would continue and a new key worker be assigned to her case now that she was an adult and transferring to the Adult Mental Handicap Service. They will look at making the young woman a Ward of Court," the report states.

There were attempts to move the young woman to residential care and away from the foster family.

These attempts were always blocked by the foster family. Grace would have to be removed forcibly, the foster mother said.

"There was a failure in the duty of care to the young woman as staff did not do the things that had been decided," the Devine report concludes.

## BRUISES

Staff were worried all this time about the bruises and the long absences when she didn't go to the day service.

On March 27, 2009, when she was 31, the day services staff saw bruises on her thighs and breasts.

She was sent to hospital which reported the bruising to the gardai and the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit.

"Marks on her body were

## Revealed: The full horror suffered by 'Grace', the girl the State forgot

## Child with disabilities was locked in cupboard

**Fíachra Ó Cionnath**  
Political Correspondent

A joint investigation by gardai and British police was launched into claims at least one other vulnerable child was seriously abused while placed at the same foster home as Grace, in addition to a small number of other "potentially serious" cases.

The fresh allegation is detailed in a second HSE-commissioned report which has also found a child with disabilities was locked in a cupboard during their stay and that no official was keeping a clear check on how many public or private placements were at the home at any one time.

Like the Conal Devine report, the Resilience Ireland report is due to be published next week after legal reasons, now removed, blocked its release for a number of years.

The 91-page report was commissioned in November 2014 in response to the 2012 Conal Devine document and was tasked with examining the

## Resilience Ireland

experiences of other vulnerable children and teens placed at the Waterford foster home.

While his findings are not as grave or detailed as the Devine report, it has covered to address any questions that raise further issues over what was taking place in the home from 1983 until 2013.

According to the Resilience Ireland report — which, like Devine, was not asked to address any questions over whether the Grace scandal was repeatedly covered up by health and social care officials — the foster family at the centre of the case began accepting private placements in 1982.

In 1985, with the assistance of both the Brothers of Charity Service and the local health service, the family were formally registered as foster carers on condition they limited placements to

two a year, meaning state placements also began.

However, despite this legal limitation, the family soon discovered they were taking in "at least" 12 children — some of whom were returned to the home — in 1984, 14 in 1985, 16 in 1986, 20 in 1987, 14 in 1988, 19 in 1989, and 16 in 1990 alone.

Following the vast majority of the families of the 46 other children and teens placed at the home between 1983 and 2013 in addition to Grace, the Resilience Ireland report found more than half of families who wished to speak to the report team did not believe their child had suffered any abuse.

However, it noted a small number of "potentially serious" cases which had been referred to gardai, including one case dating from a mid-1990s which was the subject of a joint Garda and UK police investigation.

Followed by three separate placements in the mid-1990s, "a disclosure of abuse" was reported by the family of a



Between 1983 and 2013 more than 40 other children and teenagers were placed at the same home Grace was placed at.

person with severe intellectual disabilities. While the outcome of this claim was not included in the report, it said as the family was now living in Britain, a joint Garda and UK police investigation had been launched.

The finding is included among a small number of other "potentially serious" cases which involve claims a vulnerable child was "locked in a cupboard" during a "short placement with the foster family in the 1980s".

Two other cases were also noted, but were not detailed in depth as the families involved only wished to speak to the gardai and declined to

participate in the report.

"The report also said 'nobody was keeping a check on how many children were staying' at the home at any one time, and that it could not be certain there were just nine private placements at the facility."

It also raised concerns over whether the family "were ever approved to be full-time carers" and that "we don't think the health service carried out the necessary checks".

## Publication only the beginning of the end of Grace saga

**Fíachra Ó Cionnath**

Today's publication of the Conal Devine and Resilience Ireland reports after years of repeated legal blockages is a vital step towards finding out who is responsible for what happened to Grace and other vulnerable children who were in State care.

However, with the long-promised Government-backed commission of investigation yet to take place, their release marks the end of the beginning of the case rather than the beginning of the end.

After the scandalous nature of Grace's treatment was uncovered by a whistleblower looking after her in 2009, in addition to cover-up claims involving health and social services officials, the HSE set up an investigation into the case in 2010.

## Background

The Conal Devine report, published in 2012 and only published today, detailed shocking allegations of what Grace experienced at the home — and how officials failed to protect her.

In response to the findings, a second Resilience Ireland report was commissioned in March 2014 to examine the care of 46 other vulnerable children placed at the home.

However, despite concluding in April 2015, the HSE was prevented from publishing either report until today, amid Garda concerns their release could cause damage to a criminal investigation.

Last year, a third state review of the reports by senior counsel Conor Dignam high-

lighted significant shortcomings in the documents — including concerns that files crucial to their work may have been "deliberately destroyed" by unknown persons.

Crucially, it also found there are legitimate concerns the reports' terms of reference were drawn up to specifically avoid examining repeated claims that now senior HSE and Tusla officials covered up what happened — an issue previously raised by the Dail's public accounts committee alongside the way in which the reports' authors were chosen.

As such, Mr Dignam said the reports and Grace's experience warranted a full-blown commission of investigation which had been promised by Fianna Fáil's Enda Kenny more than 12 months ago.