

Village model aided abusers, admits childcare charity boss

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A childcare chief has told an abuse inquiry that too much emphasis was placed on preventing harm from strangers rather than from people the children knew.

Charles Coggrave told the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry that children were more at risk from people who had regular contact with them, particularly regarding sexual abuse.

The head of safeguarding and aftercare for the charity Quarriers agreed that its former village model created an environment that made it easier for the children to be preyed on.

Mr Coggrave said: "When I was a child, my mum and dad would warn me about strangers. There was even some public safety awareness campaign and stranger danger was a thing. The evidence is that, particularly talking about sexual abuse, that's much more common with people you know, by people known to the child."

Witnesses have told the inquiry about emotional, physical and sexual abuse from staff during their time at Quarriers Village in Inverclyde. It provided residential care for children in cottages up until the 1980s and would usually have only one or two adults in each home, acting as "house parents".

Mr Coggrave said that the type of care and staffing levels for such organisations had evolved since the 1980s, particularly regarding oversight and complaints procedures.

Having admitted that the village model made it easier for abuse to happen, he said that it would have been a difficult environment for anyone to care for such high numbers of children.

"As a father of two, I hasten to think what it's like to have 20 children in a house. If I add to that, one assumes they came from difficult circumstances. That seems an enormous challenge to me," Mr Coggrave said.

The inquiry, before Lady Smith in Edinburgh, continues. It is hearing evidence about residential childcare establishments that were run by non-religious and voluntary organisations. It has previously considered evidence from local authorities and Catholic orders that ran children's homes.