57 victims of abuse take own lives in five years

Tuesday May 3rd 2005

BEN QUINN

AT least 57 survivors of residential institutions have taken their lives in the past five years.

That's according to a survivors' group which is to press for enhanced counselling services for people dealing with the Residential Institutions Redress Board.

A man who apparently threw himself into the Liffey in Dublin last week is believed to have been the latest survivor of the industrial school system to take their own life.

Tony Tracy of Right of Place, a state-funded organisation set up to help and support survivors of institutional abuse, said there had been 76 suicides since 1999 and at least 57 in the past five years.

Describing the figures as "shocking", he said that the organisation would be raising the issue during a meeting with the Redress Board on Friday. "We feel that the line of questioning might be a bit harsh on certain people and maybe it has an affect on them," he added.

Up to 2000, the Cork-based organisation had documented 19 suicides by adults who had been in residential care.

However, groups representing survivors say there has been a surge in the number of deaths in the past five years and point to the "cumulative affect" of possible childhood trauma and pressures later in life.

Some working in the area also have concerns about the personal pressures which many very vulnerable survivors feel in relation to the compensation they receive, or hope to receive, through the Redress Board.

The average size of awards being paid to victims is currently ?78,000 and the Redress Board anticipates it will receive between 7,500 and 8,000 claims when the three-year period for applications to the scheme closes on December 15.

Anthony 'Mousey' Delaney, a former resident of St Joseph's Industrial School in Letterfrack, Co Galway, is believed to have taken his own life last Tuesday by throwing himself into the Liffey.

Mr Delaney had visited a drop-in centre run by the National Office for Victims of Abuse (NOVA) that day.

Legislation prevents the Redress Board from commenting on individual cases. However, a spokesperson for the Department of Education said counselling services were available for survivors through the state-funded NOVA..

Ben Quinn

Irish Independent