

## **Fourth Meeting of the Citizens Assembly**

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

### **Address by Dr. Mary Ryan in respect of the First Hand Experiences**

#### **Introduction to the stories**

First of all, I would like on behalf of Sinéad Ingoldsby and myself to thank the women who so courageously and generously shared their stories with us.

This was not an easy or straightforward process for the women involved and provoked many memories, emotions and feelings. While the stories are personal, they are also universal and could be about our mothers, sisters, daughters, relations and neighbours.

Maybe as you listen to the stories, they may remind you about similar experiences and stir up strong feelings and emotions. I hope that this will not prevent you from listening and being present to the stories.

You may not agree with the decisions described in the stories, but try to listen to them in an open and non-judgemental manner.

I would now like to talk to you briefly about the process Sinead and I used to carry out the interviews.

Sinéad contacted all of the women and had a detailed phone conversation with them initially, describing the interview process.

She confirmed that their overall contribution would be edited to a duration of between approximately five and seven minutes and described the way in which it would be presented at the Assembly.

She made sure that all of the women were comfortable with the fact that ultimately their testimony would be shared more widely than within the context of the Assembly itself.

She discussed the possible publicity that might arise following the broadcasting of their personal stories at the Assembly.

This process of clarification continued at all stages of the interview and editing process. We made it clear to all of the women that they were

under no obligation to continue with the process and that they were free to withdraw their consent at any stage. All the women were happy to proceed on this basis.

The interviews ranged from thirty-five to seventy minutes in duration. Each story is unique and individual, each woman has a different way of sharing her experience, with emphasis on different aspects and details of her deeply personal narrative.

The focus of the editing process was to outline each woman's personal circumstance and that of her decision and its impact on her life in a way that would be easily accessible to those listening. We also needed to ensure that it was reflective of each woman's overall conversation in terms of tone, emphasis and opinion.

Each of the women has had an opportunity to listen to the edited version of her interview in order to ensure that she feels that it is a fair and accurate summary of her overall contribution and that she is still comfortable with it being presented to the Assembly.

Each of the woman has given full consent for their edited interviews to be so presented.

A number of themes emerged in the process of gathering the stories:

- The women welcomed the opportunity to tell their stories to the members of the assembly and hoped in doing so that it would be of benefit to other women in similar situations.
- For some women it was their first time to tell their story in public and they saw us as representing Irish society
- The need to discuss their concerns about their pregnancy and explore all options in a supportive and non-judgemental setting
- Each story is different and complex, shaped by a unique context and time. All of the women feel they made the best decision possible at that time and in that particular context.

## **Story 1**

The circumstances described in this first interview happened within the last few years.

## **Story 2**

The circumstances described in the second interview happened in the early 70s.

## **Story 3**

The circumstances described in the third interview happened over 15 years ago.

## **Story 4**

The circumstances described in the fourth interview happened within the last few years.

## **Story 5**

The circumstances described in the fifth interview happened 10 years ago.

## **Story 6**

The circumstances described in this final interview happened over 15 years ago.