

A Uachtaráin, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle....

Claire McGettrick was born and named Lorraine Hughes in 1973. She was adopted at 6 weeks of age through St Patrick's Guild Adoption Society.

As many of you are aware, over the past three decades Ireland has begun to examine and address so-called 'historical' institutional and adoption-related child abuse and gender-based violence. These abuses took place in Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Institutions and 200 plus other such institutions, where children and women were incarcerated. Countless additional agencies, institutions and individuals collaborated in forcibly separating mothers—and whole family networks—from their children. As Claire has argued, the system of institutional and family separation abuse systematically violated the most basic Constitutional rights – to dignity, equal protection under law, freedom from torture and inhuman treatment, liberty, and privacy. For many, the legacy – including the denial of access to their own identity – is ongoing.

Several lengthy reports have been published on these issues, including the most recent *MBHCOI Final Report* published on 12 January 2021. Many of the investigations and commissions, redress measures and memorialisation efforts, and the birth information legislation introduced in 2022, are the direct result of the advocacy and campaigning of individuals. Individuals like Claire McGettrick born Lorraine Hughes.

Because of Claire you may be aware of the injustices still to be righted, despite the steps taken so far. Claire McGettrick, born Lorraine Hughes, has fought tooth and nail for justice, for decades, but her core method and unrelenting aim, is to **'leave no-one behind'**. It falls to the rest of us, to give Claire credit for what she has achieved, for her leadership and example, and for her focus on the justice that remains to be delivered.

The effectiveness of the campaigns and work Claire and her colleagues, particularly Dr Maeve O'Rourke, Professor Katherine O'Donnell, Professor James Smith, Mari Steed and Susan Lohan have achieved, will only be fully appreciated in decades to come. *I say that with utter confidence as a historian.* The depth and breadth of an official Ireland – an official Ireland that in the very recent past continued to push blame onto women, families, children – can never be underestimated. How it was then, continues to echo in how many adopted individuals are treated today.

Claire was reunited with her mother when she was 20 years of age and has herself stated that she has spent over two decades in ‘a battle of wills’, with St Patrick’s Guild, TUSLA, and numerous government departments. She is the co-founder of Justice for Magdalenes, Adoption Rights Alliance, Justice for Magdalenes Research and the Clann Project. She has sat with different ministers, in a range of portfolios. She has heard platitudes, and even a few apologies. She has engaged with three different commissions of investigation and numerous redress scheme and legislative consultations. And she has **concretely** assisted hundreds if not thousands of survivors and adopted people also to do so. She has done this while receiving criticism from different sources – attacks that went past the professional into very personal realms. Yet she has continued to fight for the rights of women, for adopted persons, for those directly affected by Ireland’s horrific institutional past, and its continuing abuses in the present. There has been a cost, and it is only a cost someone who has done a portion of what Claire has done could ever understand.

The research and campaigns Claire has spearheaded have taken different approaches – most broadly in the realm of transitional justice. Justice for Magdalenes made legal and political arguments based on archival evidence and oral histories which they gathered. They mobilised an effective social justice movement, and women who were incarcerated in Irish Magdalene laundries were given a State apology and redress scheme in 2013 largely due to this work. Prior to this, Claire and Susan Lohan had co-founded the Adoption Rights Alliance (ARA). ARA advocates for the rights of adopted people, provides peer support and self-help guides, and investigates historical abuses. It is a strong, ethical, and important voice today – and both Susan and Claire deserve credit for their tenacity and persistence.

Research, Records and Access are critical to Claire’s approach. After JFM exited the advocacy space following the Taoiseach’s apology in 2013, Claire co-founded the JFM Research (JFMR) project – one of the aims of which is the education of the public on the Magdalene Laundries. The book which Claire and her JFMR colleagues published with Bloomsbury in 2021, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice*, aims to fulfil Magdalene survivors’ request that young people are educated about the past so that similar abuses never happen again.

For twenty years Claire has conducted the Magdalene Names Project, through which she gathers and analyses data from gravestones, digitized census records, electoral records, graveyard registers, death certificates, inquest records and newspaper archives to piece together

the record of all girls and women who died behind Magdalene Laundry walls. The importance of the Magdalene Names Project is **immense**, both to the family members and friends of these girls and women, and the general public in the interests of truth-telling.

She jointly coordinates the multi-award-winning CLANN project with Dr Maeve O'Rourke which collects oral histories and submissions from people affected by any of the 170+ mother and baby institutions, adoption agencies or other entities involved in family separation. These resources are **central** to how future generations will understand the institutional and child welfare-related history of Ireland.

She has dealt with the relentless barrage of social media, the at times disingenuous attitude of the 'traditional' media and the postering of state organisations. *I say this as a mere observer of her advocacy, her eloquent distillation of a personal and complex issue.* For those who know Claire better – I'm sure there are far stronger adjectives - and hopefully a few expletives they could use.

On top of all this, Claire McGettrick is an **Irish Research Council postgraduate scholar at the School of Sociology in University College Dublin**. Her PhD research is a sociological examination of the bodies of expert knowledge which exist on the topic of adoption. She is already a part of this body of knowledge in the Irish context, and as a researcher I have read, I have listened to, and I have been influenced by Claire's research. Academia will be extremely lucky to hold onto Claire. Not only because of her publications to date, her methodological approach, her passion, and her willingness to tackle topics that are extremely challenging. She demonstrates the power of interdisciplinary work, collaborative work, while also countering any arguments that effective activists and advocates do not make exceptional researchers – and vice versa. Claire has combined her life experience with her exceptional intellectual talent, bringing an empathy, objectivity and diligence to this research that was necessary. We are all the beneficiaries.

Claire McGettrick, born Lorraine Hughes, is an activist and researcher who has worked for over 20 years to make public the shameful, denigrating treatment of women and children in our institutions and adoption system – and to empower the people affected. She has done this to the benefit of us all.

It is my privilege and honour to say to you today, in front of you partner Ange, your friends, your colleagues, and your family – **thank you**. Thank you from everyone who benefits from

what you have done. Thank you from everyone who might never have to fight as hard because of you.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hanc meam filiam quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.