



HEARING THE VOICES

SHARING PERSPECTIVES IN THE VICTIM/SURVIVOR SECTOR

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Community Relations Council

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A Research Report produced under the Community Relations Council
Community Relations Research Awards Scheme 2007/08

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was commissioned by the Community Relations Council (CRC) and carried out on their behalf between May and September 2007. It was conducted with a view to its recommendations being used to feed into the work of the Community Relations Council as it responds to further policy developments in the sector, including the work of the Victims' Commissioner.

The research had the particular aim of capturing the voices and experiences of those groups and individuals funded through the Council's Victims' Programme, referred to here as the sector. It asked groups to consider the opportunities and challenges the sector faces in the context of developing shared working in terms of policy and practice.

Particular consideration was paid to

- commemoration and memorialisation and
- trans-generational issues.

The findings of this research are based on an action-based project devised to enable participants to have a formative role in determining the direction and findings of the research. A number of key issues and cross-cutting themes of concern to the sector as a whole were identified in a series of 30 in-depth interviews. These were further explored collectively in a seminar day through workshops and discussions which brought together 47 members of the groups.

Twelve principal and connected themes emerged from the consultation:

- 1. The capacity of the sector.** Groups demonstrate a wide range of capacity in human, material, financial and professional resources. The sector's three key areas of working (Advocacy, Social networks of support and Psycho-social therapeutic interventions) are not exclusive or discrete areas, with many individuals using more than one group for a variety of services.
- 2. Dominant voices and silent voices.** Some individuals in the sector are advantaged by having strong and articulate voices, others find that the dominant voices can silence or exclude their 'more moderate' views and those of less politically-motivated groups. Gender and location are significant variables in both of these situations. Silence and silencing in the interest of political expediency is as commonplace as self-censorship carried out for reasons of safety and fear.
- 3. Support and recommendations for a Forum.** There is overwhelming support for a Victims' Forum to advance community relations. A variety of proposals have been recommended by the sector as to how the Forum might be constituted to work as a consensual and respectful space and to encourage debate on issues of mutual concern including community relations.
- 4. Readiness for shared working.** There is significant amount of inter-community work already being undertaken by the sector, often being carried out quietly and discreetly. All groups indicated a willingness to explore methods of working with others – but the extent to which they are ready or resourced to do so varies quite considerably.
- 5. Barriers to shared working.** The principal barriers that currently hamper shared working for the majority of the sector are related to finance, organisational structures and sustainability, geography, culture and communication.

- 6. Recognition of the trans-generational impact of the conflict.** The impact of loss and of traumatic events that have been experienced, witnessed and absorbed continue to have trans- and inter-generational implications. Coping mechanisms employed throughout the conflict continue to affect families and these include distancing, avoidance, silence, denial, unilateral acceptance and normalisation (as well as the use and misuse of prescribed and non-prescribed medication).
- 7. Complexity of commemoration in a shared future.** There is an overwhelming sense from the sector that they do not wish to see more public money spent on monuments or memorials. For most, the long-term ideal of any shared commemoration is too early to be realised. Most groups in the sector want their own organisation's memorials to be thought of as being discreetly situated and to be 'sought out' within their own premises so as to promote spaces of reflection rather than glorification. Groups recognise the significance of particular public sites but do not want to be pushed into having these restored, regenerated, dismantled or developed in what they see as the interests of political expediency until discussions and consultations have been facilitated appropriately to enable their views to be fed into the debates.
- 8. Funding structures.** Groups in the sector are often more able to secure funding for innovative programming than for sustaining proven and established projects. This has participation and operational implications. Groups feel they are encouraged to 'wear the victim's hat' and to evidence 'reconciliation' to the extent that the planning and delivery of their services sometimes becomes skewed and not genuinely needs-based.
- 9. Accredited training and professionalisation.** There is broad consensus in the sector that any current imbalances existing between groups because of their resources and capacity will be exacerbated by placing too high a status on an ability to deliver accredited skills and pursue programmes and activities based on medical models. The current value placed on community networks of support and encounter by users and members is in danger of being undermined by such a process.
- 10. Strategic planning and short-termism.** The outcome of current funding structures results in projects and programmes often only being able to plan in the short-term. Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence that indicates the Sector's needs are long-term in nature and that groups are increasingly being approached to consider second and third generational impact.
- 11. Clarification of A Shared Future.** The limited reference to the sector in 'A Shared Future' and governmental action plans is of concern given the sector's direct experiences of the Conflict. The Sector feels that groups should have been explicitly sought out to be part of any discussions about the implications of the strategy and in many instances are unclear and particularly concerned about what these might be in the long-term.
- 12. Need for further discussions.** The sector identified a number of areas and issues on which they welcome the opportunity to take part in facilitated discussions in the near future, and

certainly before any further decisions are made in terms of policy or legislation relating to those areas.

Within these findings and themes, a variety of other cross-cutting issues are presented that include:

- **Language, definitions and key words** (as well as the use of politically loaded and insensitive terminology and the need for the Commissioner to determine appropriate language for use in Government department communications and for working with groups. There is an acknowledgement of the challenges presented by words that the sector uses frequently, but has limited collective agreement on, such as truth and reconciliation).
- **Relationships and trust-building** (the sector broadly welcomes the opportunity to discuss and seek out ways to work with ‘other’ communities, although some groups also feel they are being rushed into working outside their ‘comfort zone’ before they are adequately supported to do so).
- **Networks of support** (the report recognises that resilience and capacity to ‘cope’ is acknowledged and celebrated in many instances, but also highlights the challenges that present for the sector, including a high level of burn-out, a reliance on volunteers who themselves have residual needs and the frustration at not being to adequately source long-term support).
- **Commemoration** (this is discussed within the context of the cost and value of private and public processes of memorialisation, of how social memories are embedded in communities and individuals and as a component of community relations in formal and informal education).
- **Trans-generational issues** (the Conflict and the various ways in which it impacts on families are considered to affect the health and well-being and the emotional responses of children and young people. The central role to be played by communities and families in addressing woundedness and developing healthy coping mechanisms is also discussed).

These findings from the primary sources comprise the body of the report. They are framed by a literature review that explores material of relevance to these issues that has been produced both locally and internationally.

A typology was developed over the course of the research on the basis of groups’ comments and observations. Victims of the conflict were found to fall into four broad categories:

- Victims of paramilitary, sectarian and anti-state actions.
- Victims of actions taken by the state.
- People who have ‘disappeared’ or been disenfranchised in their own communities, been exiled or killed by ‘their own side’, or have otherwise vanished in unresolved circumstances.
- People who have been traumatised or suffered as a result of witnessing or otherwise incorporating and embedding violence in their psyche.

A series of recommendations based on the analysis of the research findings and literature review have been collated into three categories and presented as fifteen recommendations for Government, seven for an incoming Victims’ Commissioner and seven for the community-based sectoral groups (Section 7).

1. Recommendations for Government

The recommendations for Government fall into broad thematic areas that do not fit the remit of one specific department alone. The recommendations point to the value of joined-up and inter-departmental working when seeking out ways to meet the needs of people affected by the Conflict. It is recommended that the Government consult with and involve the sector in advancing such work.

Education

- 1.1 A review of the curriculum should be carried out, particularly in the areas of History, Citizenship and Personal Development, to ensure that these include an acknowledgement of the complexity of and paradoxes within local history and society.
- 1.2 Teachers and trainee teachers should be supported further through teacher training colleges and the Education and Library Boards to be sensitive to the sector when addressing challenging issues related to divided communities and the complex narratives of the Conflict in the classroom.

Media

- 1.3 Existing media guidelines around reporting on issues related to the Conflict should be re-examined within the context of the growing understanding of the trans-generational impact of the Conflict. Protocols should be revisited around the way in which Conflict-related stories are portrayed.

Arts and Culture

- 1.4 The continuation of the rich portfolio of arts projects, exhibitions, festivals and materials supported by the Government and district and city councils should be encouraged as a process of acknowledging and engaging with the legacy of the Conflict. Consideration should be given to composing a short phrase or declaration to appear on all supporting literature that would present information about alternative

perspectives on the themes being addressed. This might read along the lines of “The artist and sponsors attached to this event extend their thoughts to all those for whom this production resonates and acknowledge the significance of the losses experienced in all communities.”

- 1.5 Government should work closely with organisations and individuals commissioning and supporting conflict-related public art works and memorials to ensure that communities are adequately consulted about the installation of challenging or provocative objects or displays.

Funding

- 1.6 Funding and evaluation criteria should be developed with a view to motivating and holding to account those groups that are well resourced and strongly represented in the sector to develop links with groups and individuals that are less well resourced and less confident.
- 1.7 Funding and evaluation criteria should support the initiation and ongoing development of community-based projects that incorporate an acknowledgement of the perspectives and experiences of communities from other backgrounds in the context of the Conflict and its legacy.

Social Welfare

- 1.8 Qualitative research should be undertaken into the local challenges and international precedents involved in developing ways of working in the sector that are proofed on the basis of human rights and equality .
- 1.9 The perspectives of people affected by the Conflict should be specifically sought out and respected in the course of any Equality Impact Assessment (EQUIA) or other consultations carried out on behalf of Government.

Health

- 1.10 Resources should be made available for the development and delivery of standardised and accredited training courses for all community-

based practitioners providing therapeutic interventions such as counselling and complementary therapies. These training programmes should be designed and delivered with a view to developing links between community-based groups from diverse backgrounds who identify similar needs within their client base/membership.

- 1.11 Resources should be made available for the development and delivery on demand of family therapy and other systemic support structures. These and other therapeutic services should be made available in neutral public environments, i.e. not only in the context of community-based groups.
- 1.12 There should be official recognition of the value of low-key support and befriending services as actions which complement professional therapeutic interventions.
- 1.13 There is a need for a public health campaign to raise awareness of the long term and trans-generational effects of trauma and to destigmatise the process of seeking support for conflict-related issues

Development of Sites of Significance

- 1.14 There should be clear protocols for communication with the sector about plans for the restoration, regeneration or dismantling of buildings and fixtures in public spaces to ascertain their significance to people affected by the Conflict.
- 1.15 If sites identified for regeneration are discovered to be of significance to people affected by the Conflict, the needs and perspectives of those people should be taken into account in deciding how to proceed with the regeneration projects concerned.

2. Recommendations for the Victims' Commissioner

At the time of writing, groups remain frustrated by the lack of a Commissioner and the lack of consultation with the sector as to the appointment. On appointment, the Commissioner should prioritise the following:

- 2.1 Determine the use of language that will be appropriate for use in Government departmental communications and in shared working between groups from diverse backgrounds.
- 2.2 Set standards and protocols for shared working in the Sector.
- 2.3 Develop a code of conduct for projects that require shared working between community groups from diverse backgrounds, and between community-based and statutory organisations.
- 2.4 Establish an all-party working group on victim/survivor issues.
- 2.5 Establish an inter-departmental working group and network of partnership organisations outside the Victims' Forum with a view to developing Action Plans for engaging with the Sector. Other organisations which could be represented in such a network include (though not exclusively) the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission, the PSNI, and the NIO.
- 2.6 Acknowledge good practice within the Sector and disseminate this via electronic and other media where appropriate.
- 2.7 Collect oral histories, narratives and reminiscences of the Sector, drawing them together in a way that reflects a parity of esteem for experiences across the Sector.

3. Recommendations for Community-Based Sectoral Groups

We recognise that some groups struggle with the concept of shared working and encourage community-based organisations engaged in advocacy and in the delivery of a range of professional and other support services to consider the following:

- 3.1 Those groups that are well resourced and that have a strong influence or ‘voice’ in the Sector should take steps to reach out to and develop partnerships both across and within communities, with groups that are less well resourced and whose voices are not as easily heard.
- 3.2 Groups should be bold and consistent about drawing attention to their needs and core issues in a public way. They should seek out and identify groups for partnership working, both within and across communities, who have similar concerns and with whom they could co-ordinate advocacy and practice-based work.
- 3.3 Groups should take responsibility for building capacity within their membership by engaging constructively with people from other communities in cross-community settings. For example, supported space should be created within groups to discuss problematic and emotive concepts and terms such as ‘reconciliation’, ‘truth’ and ‘justice’.
- 3.4 Groups should develop programmes of activity that aim to demonstrate shared working within the Sector, or that demonstrate an intention to ultimately move their constituency towards shared working.
- 3.5 Groups should acknowledge the reality and implications of organisational burnout and take additional measures to avoid and/or cope with that situation by developing partnership working.
- 3.6 Those organising storytelling and oral history projects should be cognisant of the potential for embedding social memories and of the trans-generational impact of the way in which stories related to the Conflict and its legacy are told, recorded and disseminated. Groups should undertake to evaluate the challenges facing those engaged in shared working in storytelling and the recording of oral histories.
- 3.7 Groups should take a leadership role in their communities regarding commemoration and memorialisation. They should become actively involved in the processes of consultation around and installation of memorials and work to develop a culture of respect for other groups’ commemorative spaces.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report owes its existence to the contribution of many people who continue to experience the impact of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. It is dedicated to them and to all those people they consider a significant absent presence in their lives.

When thinking through the issues addressed in this report, we acknowledge valued conversations with many others working on similar themes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims

This report is the result of a six-month research project funded by the Community Relations Council (CRC) under their Community Relations Research Awards.

The project aims to capture the voices and experiences of those groups and individuals who have been core- or project-funded through the Council's Victims' Programme, referred to here as 'the sector'. There is a focus on the opportunities and challenges that present themselves to the future of the sector. Specific attention has been given to the interviewees' views in three key areas:

- a 'shared future' and shared working in terms of policy and practice,
- commemoration and memorialisation and
- trans-generational issues.

The study privileges and respects the voices and position of its contributors. Any discussion or analysis of their words here is an attempt to honour the feelings, perceptions and interpretations they presented. Introducing dual and sometimes opposing positions is intended to demonstrate the breadth of cognition and emotion being expressed and not to challenge or undermine diverse perspectives in any way.

By introducing, if not exploring sufficiently, issues raised by participants to the study, the report attempts to ensure that equal recognition is paid to all their concerns. There is value in looking at their core themes in both vertical terms (in relation to the structures that are, have been or need to be put in place to address these concerns) and in horizontal terms (in

relation to the wider diverse social implications they bring). It is acknowledged that there is need and willingness among participants for further discussions and research in a number of key areas.

The research builds on the existing myriad policy documents and community-based responses to the Conflict and its legacy in and about Northern Ireland¹.

The action-based research methodology we employed was intended to inform and contribute to ongoing discussions and policy developments in this area by the provision of views ascertained through collaborative working. It was conducted with a view to the recommendations being used to feed into the work of the Victims' Commissioner as well as to the CRC's responses to Governmental strategies in relation to Victims and Survivors of the Conflict.

1.2 Victims and Survivors

Since the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, there has been a blossoming of a sector that comprises a diverse collection of groups and organisations wishing to represent the best interests of those whose lives have been impacted by the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland. In some instances, this report will use the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' to refer to those individuals and groups. However, there has been some considerable and unresolved debate as to what constitutes a 'victim' and whether or not labels such as 'victim', 'survivor' and 'perpetrator' are helpful. These and other problematic terms appear to play some part in hampering the progress of discussions within the sector. The issue of terminology, including labelling and definition, will be considered further in Section 5.1.

¹ This report borrows the phrase "in and about Northern Ireland" from Healing Through Remembering (2006c).

This research draws on an established body of international literature that relates to victims of conflict, considering amongst other issues:

- the medicalisation and pathologising of trauma,
- memorialisation and commemoration, and
- the trans-generational impact of conflict.

This information is supplemented with the emerging literature engaging with those themes in an Irish context. The literature review in Section 3 will draw together some of the key debates from that material with a view to addressing future practice and policy developments concerned with the extent of the Conflict's impact on society.

Given the interplay of those political, socio-economic and cultural forces operating in Northern Ireland which gave rise to and sustained the Conflict, a diverse variety of political, socio-economic and cultural interventions are required to help address the legacy of loss, trauma and structural inequalities. This report works from the premise that it is communities, with the support of government, that are best placed to direct the rebuilding of their devastated social worlds; they are most able to adapt and recover and manage their suffering on a collective basis. One of the sector's challenges to achieving a healthy recovery is acknowledging that as part of that process, common ground and shared concerns need to be unearthed. Recognising and exploring common ground as a shaper of reconciliation² provides the foundations for the successful rebuilding of communities and of inter-community working.

The sector is conscious of the ways in which funding criteria and the operational plans of statutory and partnering bodies influence how work is commissioned, developed and disseminated. It is noteworthy that there are sincere concerns across the sector regarding the extent to which political expediency is responsible for the speed at which the sector is encouraged to make decisions about partnership working, methods and modes of commemoration. Related to these concerns are the trans-generational implications for decision-making and work being carried out with and on behalf of the sector in a time scale that is imposed, rather than determined by the sector's key stakeholders.

2 This report will adopt the Democratic Dialogue definition of reconciliation as outlined by Kelly and Hamber (2004) and consider it defined as follows:

“Reconciliation is the process of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships and this includes a range of activities. It is a voluntary act that cannot be imposed. A reconciliation process generally involves five interwoven and related strands:

- 1) *Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society.*
- 2) *Acknowledging and dealing with the past.*
- 3) *Building positive relationships.*
- 4) *Significant cultural and attitudinal change.*
- 5) *Substantial social, economic and political change”*

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Award

A proposal was accepted under the Community Relations Research Awards Scheme 2007-2008 to consider the challenges, opportunities and expectations of the sector in terms of policy and practice when considering future working and with a focus on the themes of commemoration and memorialisation and trans-generational issues.

The methodology was aimed at being as consensual a process as possible. To that end we invited all of the groups who are either core- or project-funded by the CRC to participate in the research.

2.2 Project Initiation

A project initiation meeting was held with representatives of the CRC's Victims' Programme at which the sample, project plan, schedule, data and information requirements were agreed, as well as final deliverables in relation to the research report and seminar day. At that meeting a preferred methodology, the ethos of the research and confidentiality issues for the research team were also agreed.

2.3 Literature Review

The literature review explored published material considering victim and survivor issues in both the local and international context and continued throughout the duration of the research process. Particular attention was paid to those materials provided by groups being researched and which were published by or about the local sector. These included evaluation and policy consultation responses, research reports and academic articles. The review has been drawn on in Section 5 of the report to frame the

findings of this project within the existing body of literature. Many of the key issues in the literature review that relate to the sector were not incorporated in this report as they were outside the parameters of the research remit and its particular focus on questions of shared working, the impact of trans-generational trauma, commemoration and memorialisation.

2.4 Sample

The sample was drawn from the 98 groups either core- or project-funded by the CRC's Victims Programme, a large number of which are frequently identified as 'Parallel Service Providers'. 37 groups (38% of the CRC's total Victims' Programme body) responded to our invitation to take part in the process by being interviewed. Several of these groups communicated with us as formal or informal representatives of clusters of organisations that are core- or project-funded by the CRC. 13 of the group consulted (35%) have a mandate to work with people younger than 18 years of age.

All of the groups interviewed were invited to attend a seminar day where the issues raised in individual sessions were further explored collectively. 47 people from 27 groups (77% of the original sample) and three Trauma Advisory Panel representatives were able to attend the seminar day.

2.5 Designing and Conducting the Research

A qualitative approach to the fieldwork in the first instance involved focus groups and semi-structured interviews conducted with groups or individuals. Out of these encounters, key issues were gathered and formulated into questions and scenarios for collective discussions in mixed groups at the seminar. The findings of that day – i.e. the agreements and areas

which proved challenging – have all been recorded and incorporated into the report’s findings and analysis.

The methodology was chosen as it was seen to enable participants to play a formative role in determining both the direction and the findings of the research, as well as to provide a degree of flexibility in how people were enabled to engage in working with other groups and individuals. The researchers met with interviewees in their chosen location and discussed issues that were of principal concern to the participants in what the interviewees considered a safe environment. Notes taken at the interviews were written up and, where possible, sent to participants for any changes or additions they wished to make; these changes were then incorporated. Interviewees were invited to attend a presentation of interim findings at a seminar and in workshops teased out collective responses to issues that had been presented in the individual session that had been noted to be of concern to all the participants.

This approach gave us collective and consensual a set of responses that could have been hoped for under the circumstances and for that we are extremely grateful. It is noteworthy that in many instances the message we received from the interviewees was that this was the first time researchers had come to hear their stories and to acknowledge individuals’ unique circumstances “*without a questionnaire to be ticked*”, as one person commented. This led us to reflect on how research and inquiry has been carried out in the sector in the past (Hargie & Dickson 2002) and to make the recommendation that, in the future, special time and energy be devoted to developing methodologies that are appropriate to individuals’ circumstances and needs.

2.6 Value Base

It was the intention of the research team to ensure that all of those issues raised by participants to the research were at least acknowledged in the final report, if not adequately addressed. In doing so, we have attempted to use language that is not value-laden. We recognise that for some this may result in their feeling that the views that they have expressed to us have been neutralised. We acknowledge that this has caused hurt and frustration for some groups in the past. Our aim has been to encourage dialogue both in the research process and through the presentation of the report and to create an atmosphere where common grounds and shared concerns can be aired.

2.7 Confidentiality

None of the quotations or narratives used are attributed to individuals or to the organisations they represent. This approach has been chosen for two reasons:

- to ensure individual confidentiality and
- to resist creating a report which draws lines around communities rather than connecting them with one another on the issues explored.

We believe that this approach does not take away from the clear expression of the participants’ views and concerns or undermine the specific skill sets of individual groups. Instead our aim is to acknowledge the contribution made by all organisations in an equal way, and to open up the possibility of their recognising themselves not only in their own contributions but in the contributions of other groups too.

Participants who took part in the seminar were identified by first name and they were given the opportunity in the workshops to identify themselves by organisation if they chose to do so.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This literature review attempts to give an overview of some of the material relating to conflict that has specific relevance to this research project's areas of interest. It does not claim to be an exhaustive study. We appreciate the breadth of academic analysis and policy-related literature which impacts on the sector, not least of which is the commitment by the signatories to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement that *'the participants believe that it is essential to acknowledge the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation'* and that *'the provision of services that are supportive and sensitive to the needs of victims will also be a critical element.'* (NIO 1998: 18). Equally, we recognise the value of material produced by groups that focuses on their work and the narratives of their members and users and consider that groups' experiences and perceptions are key elements in any process of acknowledgement.

One premise for this review is that the effects and experiences of conflict and trauma on individuals (irrespective of who they are or what their geographical location is) permeates the communities in which they live and the wider society to which they belong. An overview of some of the material which analyses this impact in both the local and international contexts seeks out commonalities. This approach does not, however, deny the uniqueness of every individual and the conflict to which they are connected.

During the late 1990s, a number of reports considered the legacy of the conflict. Some related to policy development (Bloomfield 1998), while others were aligned to academic and practice-based disciplines (Ruane and Todd 1996; Fay *et al* 1999). The subsequent articles they have spawned remain starting points for much of the emerging work that grapples

with the extent and legacy of the conflict and its trans-generational impact on children, young people and families (Peake 2001, Muldoon 2004, McEvoy-Levy 2006). McKitterick *et al*'s (1999) seminal chronology of the cost of the legacy of sectarianism in human terms is a key reference point for most literature that has followed in its wake. But despite attempts to analyse the nature of victimhood (Cairns and Mallet 2003), the enormity of the conflict, perhaps, makes it inevitable that its entirety is not yet recorded. There are significant gaps in the literature relating to oral narratives from a number of sections of society including the families of security service personnel and other armed groups and any analysis of the role of memorialisation in the transmission and embedding of sectarian values or of trans-generational trauma has not yet been adequately considered. Furthermore, despite a significant changing governance and policy context (including "A Shared Future" and the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability) and recent developments in the field of Criminal Justice, the legacy of violence (both structural and physical) remains a familiar feature of life, even though it often glossed over for the sake of expedience. Furthermore, the residue of segregation, division, economic deprivation and poverty continues to negatively impact on the health of many citizens (Tomlinson 2007).

3.2 Trauma, Health and Well-being

Death and injury represent a primary human cost of the Conflict (Smyth & Hamilton 2002). Other crucial elements include imprisonment and intimidation and the witnessing and absorbing of violent acts, all of which are found to impact on the health and well-being of those who lived through the Conflict. Researchers who began writing about the Conflict in the 1990s displayed a predisposition to focus on its psychological effects (Curran *et al.* 1990;

Dillenburg 1992; O'Reilly 1998; Bolton 1996). Two broad schools of thought have emerged. The first is that the majority of people living through the Conflict in the North felt that it did not have much impact on their lives and that people coped very well – usually by denying the existence of its impact (Cairns & Wilson 1989). The other position is that everyone was touched in some way by the Conflict (Ruane & Todd 1996). These views perhaps laid the seed for current practice based work and research that focuses particularly on the psychological effects of the conflict (Muldoon *et al.* 2004) and while some others have considered the breadth of the role of clinical and non-clinical therapies (Radford 2006) and family work (Burrows and Keenan 2004a, 2004b), there is a particular focus on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (Hayes & Campbell 2000; Gilligan 2006; Keenan 2007; see also Bisson 2007).

The language of trauma has become commonplace (Young 1995) and some suggest that rightly or wrongly, when we question the scientific basis for trauma interventions, the orthodoxy that informs public funding and service provision is challenged (Bracken and Petty 1998). Summerfield (1998:31) cautions against labelling and pathologising, seeing them as dehumanising, and furthermore suggests that imposing trauma discourse can impair the '*struggle to reconstitute a shared sense of reality, morality and dignity*'. Writing in the British Medical Journal, Summerfield (2000: 234) considers the implications faced by conflict and post-conflict societies when medical models and in particular psychiatric methods, which "*give little acknowledgement to the role of social action and empowerment in promoting mental health*", are privileged over other therapeutic interventions. Furthermore, there is a danger in considering stress as psychological disturbance: Summerfield suggests that stress needs to be considered within the cultural and historic context in

which people are operating.

Boydell *et al* (2007) suggest that many people had repeated and frequent experiences of 'low intensity' violence and disruption which raised anxiety and stress levels. Whatever the scale of the impact of the violence, Manktelow (2007) suggests that the statutory services were unable to meet needs or provide adequate social welfare in the past. He proposes a number of reasons for this including the case for public service professionals themselves having had need to draw on avoidance strategies to emphasise their neutrality. There has been some further consideration of the role of carers by the Community Relations Council (CRC 2006). Danieli (1996: 440) warns that treatment to address the deep and long-lasting scars is imperative but too often neglected, and that '*unless treated, the germ of hatred and holding on to the image of the enemy May give rise to new conflicts and bloody clashes between ethnic or religious groups in an endless cycle of violence. Victims may become perpetrators as individuals, members of families and communities, and as nations.*' And Batniji (2006) considers that the extent of non-pathological mental health issues are a human cost that is immeasurable.

Communities and community cohesion are vital to the work of breaking cycles of violence. Summerfield (1998) revealed that there was a higher incidence of depression amongst Iraqi asylum seekers in London with poor social support systems than for those who had experienced a history of torture. In the main, the influence of unemployment and poverty on general and mental health is widely accepted. Yet the extent to which these and the disruption and trauma to civic society brought to the health and well-being families and individuals has not yet been adequately understood or addressed in service delivery terms (Morrissey & Smyth 2002, Tomlinson 2007).

3.3 Coping Mechanisms

Manktelow (2007) considers three principal coping strategies were used to preserve emotional and mental well-being in the absence of appropriate services:

- denial,
- distancing and
- habituation.

A variety of mechanisms were called on to assist these processes. For some, habituation meant that life simply continued with the deviant and the irregular becoming normalised (Gallagher, 2004). For others there developed a state-supported reliance on prescription medication Schlindwein (2000).

The formation of the Trauma Advisory Panels in 1999 soon after the Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Services Trust established a Community Trauma and Recovery Team in 1998 was a significant co-ordinated response by social services. Since then, a variety of self help directories, programmes, newsletters and reports into the needs of the sector in the different areas have been developed by and emanated from these bodies. Not least of these is an overview of literature and programmes by the South West LSP (2006) which complements other audits and evaluations of services to the sector, including those carried out on behalf of OFMDFM by Deloitte and Touche (OFMDFM 2001) and presented to OFMDFM by NIMTT (2006). Yet despite the growing material highlighting the need for appropriate interventions and public health campaigns in relation to the impact of the Conflict, in many instances, the recommendations of these and other documents appear not yet to have been implemented or rolled out.

3.4 Gender

Women's experiences of conflict while not homogenous often differ from men's (Meintjes 2001). Both Meintjes (2001:5) and the World Health Organisation (2000) suggest that the symptoms women display in relation to trauma can be more complex and enduring than those displayed by men. Writing of conflict in and about South Africa, the Middle East, Bosnia, Rwanda and Northern Ireland,

Morgan (1996) suggests that women's experiences are 'over-simplified and 'over-generalised'. There remains a common concern among those engaged with debates about post-conflict reconstruction that women 'lack direct influence in the identification of reconstruction priorities that are usually part of a peace agreement' (Sørensen 1998). Despite women playing an influential role in grassroots non governmental organisations and in the voluntary and community sector as well as being activists, their roles and rights are often subordinated during and after conflict (Edgerton 1986; Belfrage 1987; Dillenburger 1992; Ward 1996; Sales 1997; Artexaga 1997; Radford 2001; Sharoni 2001, Ashe 2007). This situation only occasionally appears to improve during post-conflict situations.

3.5 Youth and Trans-generational issues

The impact of the Conflict is an issue with ripples that spans generations and that has implications for how social memory in communities is constructed as well as for the health implications identified above and in studies such as Hayes and Campbell (2000). Reviewing the literature of the Holocaust, Solkoff (1992) considers that psycho-analytically-oriented studies bear out the concept of trans-generational transmission of trauma, while population studies are unlikely to.

It is noteworthy that to date, despite the emerging literature on trans-generational trauma in other contexts (Levine 1997; Bar-on 1998), very little investigation into the trans-generational impact of the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland has been documented. However, in that emerging literature, links are being drawn between the reception and transmission of inter- and trans-generational trauma and the hardening of sectarian behaviour at interface areas, as well as with the increase in self harm and completed suicides in polarised areas (Wave 2003; Beattie *et al* 2006; Tomlinson 2007). Young people in the current context are therefore increasingly being seen to be implicated as actors in a process of absorbing trauma across generations. Furthermore, layered issues of poor relationships with the police (Radford *et al* 2005) and experiences or threats of

enforced exiling or punishment by individuals from within their own communities has been a feature of life for a significant minority of young people (Feenan 2004: 41). Summerfield (2000) acknowledges the value of community and family responses as being key to enabling people to rebuild and weave their social fabric back together: *‘Anything that is pro-family (including employment opportunities) and pro-community will help children recover a more positive social reality’*. And within both practice and academic arenas, this work is being addressed in ground-breaking ways in the work of community groups valued in the work of Burrows & Keenan (2004).

Young (1995) considers traumatic memory as a social construct, and when discussing Northern Ireland, Summerfield (1998) remarks on how two seemingly irreconcilable sets of social memories are employed to sustain reluctance for shared working. However, drawing on theories of collective behaviour and group think analysis and on the experiences of the Holocaust Museums and Educational Trusts (Danieli 1996, 1999, 2001), it might be suggested that when memorialisation is used to embed collective narratives in groups. This can link into mental health and well-being issues trans-generationally, both positively and negatively (Bar-on 1998). If acts of commemoration and memorialisation feed into psycho-social modes of healing through remembrance as well as into the inter-generational dissemination of collective trauma, issues of silence and dominant voices are key areas of consideration (Radford, 2004a, 2004b). These concerns resonate with those working at community level with both constituencies considered primarily nationalist and republican (Hamber 2005), as well as those which are predominantly unionist and loyalist (Spence 2002).

3.6 Commemoration, Memorialisation and Remembrance

While the role of material culture associated with commemoration, memorialisation and remembrance is the subject of some considerable academic discussion elsewhere, (Forty and Kuchler 1999, Hallam and Hockey 2001, Santino 2006), very little

material considers this within a Northern Irish context (see Officer 2001). This may be due to the fact that commemoration as popularly understood is a process which only begins once a conflict is *over*, or at least in the period of transition from conflict to peace time. The South African experience is instructive of this: in that country, commemorative sites and memorials have been actively developed and commissioned by local and national government bodies as part of the ‘nation building process’ since the break with Apartheid in 1994 (Hansen 2003; Naidu 2004; Southern African Reconciliation Project 2005). This of course does not mean that there were no commemorations or memorials in South Africa before that time: what is emphasised here is that commemoration of a particular era or sequence of events generally begins as that period draws to a close (see Nutall & Coetzee 2000). The concept of erecting monuments, inscribing texts in certain places and initiating rituals of remembrance as part of embarking on a new phase or political era is not only about marking an end to the old era, but also involves defining the new one. The process of definition entails affirming identities and claiming or reclaiming space or territory for the new dispensation (Connerton 1989; Zerubavel 1995).

In the local context, however, the abundance of spontaneous and more established commemorative rituals and permanent or semi-permanent memorials in both rural and urban areas suggests that commemoration and memorialisation are integral not only to the peace process but also to an understanding of the dynamics of the Conflict itself. The nascent work of Brown (Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University Belfast) highlights this point, demonstrating that *“[b]oth Loyalists and Republicans have engaged in the memorialisation of their dead in the course of the conflict with parades, plaques, wall murals and monuments”* (2007: 3) (emphasis added). Both fixed memorials and commemorative displays and marches (including flags) contribute to the often stark territorial demarcation of certain areas in Northern Ireland. The challenges of *“reclaiming shared space”* and *“reducing tensions at interface areas”* were highlighted in the “Shared Future” strategy (OFMDFM 2005: 19-24), and whereas a

certain amount of research into these issues has been produced to date (see Bryan & Gillespie 2006), this is an area that requires further investigation.

In the current political climate, it may be expected that more critical engagement with local commemorative processes will begin to emerge in the literature. Resources for such engagement are becoming readily available: the massive on-line digital archive CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) has an extensive collection of images and other descriptions of commemorative sites, plaques and rituals. The existing database is currently being expanded upon in a project that explicitly links remembrance to victims' issues in Northern Ireland³. Preliminary examinations of the themes of commemoration and remembrance in both the local and international context have been carried out on behalf of Healing Through Remembering (Nagle 2006; Fitzgerald 2006; see also Healing Through Remembering 2006a, 2006b). In addition, recent research into questions of silence, memory and the significance of location in relation to memories of violence within Northern Ireland border communities elucidates key themes of relevance to commemoration in the local context (Donnan 2005; Donnan & Simpson 2007).

It has been suggested that many local commemorative events and murals provide both intentional and unintentional militarised models for young people (Save the Children 2004). The impact on young people of the use of certain language, militaristic symbols, dramatic and even terrifying images and iconography, the practices of drilling and parading, and the glorification of weapons cannot be underestimated (Peake 2001; Smyth & Thomson 2000). The pervasiveness of these elements in certain parts of Northern Ireland has the effect of filling young people with the desire to emulate ritualised militaristic commemoration (Brett & Specht 2004; McEvoy Levy 2006). Furthermore, the role accorded to the status of ex-combatants in the process of dealing with the consequences of violence and in the

transition from victim to survivor status requires further investigation (Becker 2001, cited in Hamber 2005).

Hirsch points out that memory can be “*manipulated to serve political power, and the ability to manipulate memory is, in itself, a measure of that power*” (1995: 22). Brown highlights the relevance of this perspective for the local context, suggesting that while commemoration and memorialisation are primarily acts of remembrance for people who have died, and are therefore acts of mourning, they are also frequently invested with political significance or incorporated into political projects (2007: 3).

³ The project is entitled “‘Remembering’: Victims, Survivors and Commemoration in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland”. For more, see <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/index.html>.

4. FINDINGS

Twelve key themes emerged from the interviews which were of concern to all of the research participants:

1. The capacity of groups and individuals,
2. Dominant voices and silent voices,
3. Support and recommendations for a Forum,
4. Readiness for shared working,
5. Barriers to shared working,
6. Recognition of the trans-generational impact of the Conflict,
7. Complexity of commemoration in a ‘shared future’,
8. Funding structures,
9. Accredited training and professionalisation,
10. Strategic Planning and short-termism,
11. Clarification of ‘A Shared Future’ and
12. Need for further discussions.

Within these themes, a variety of other cross-cutting issues arose that included:

- Language, definitions and key words,
- Relationships and trust-building,
- Networks of support,
- Commemoration and
- Trans-generational issues.

The principal findings will be summarised in this section and then, along with the cross-cutting themes and other issues of concern to participants, will be revisited in the Analysis (Section 5) as part of a wider discussion.

4.1 The Capacity of Groups and Individuals

“Capacity building needs to be ongoing. Victimhood and victims’ issues need to be addressed both as a specific area requiring focussed attention, and as part of every other service available in civil society. But this should not only happen – and won’t ever happen in a genuine way – on the basis or motivation of ‘just ticking the ‘cross-community’ criterion box’.”

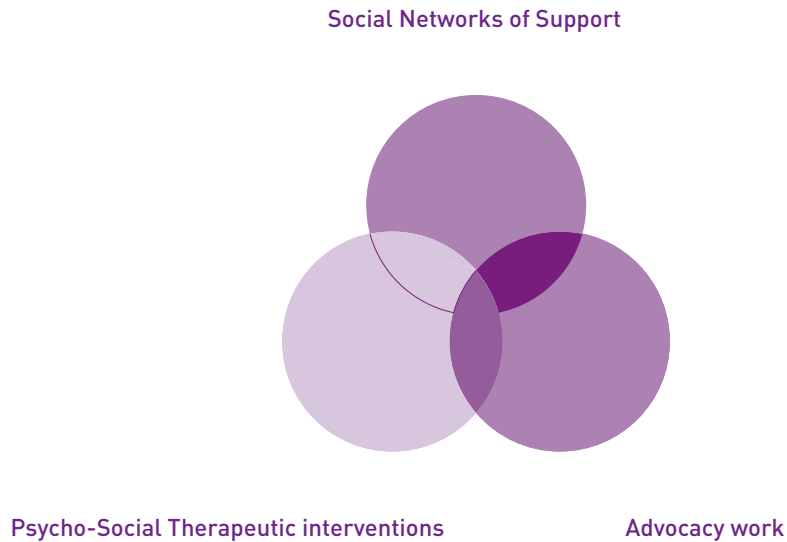
Groups demonstrate a wide range of capacity in financial and professional terms, in the numbers of members or clients they are able to accommodate and in the geographical area they are able to serve. This breadth is both a challenge to and a valuable aspect of the sector. It is a challenge insofar as it compels the sector and its funders to devise ways of coordinating shared working without allowing the more articulate, well-resourced and professionally qualified and trained groups to dominate the scene. It is of value in the sense that there is already a wealth of approaches and expertise in the sector to be shared, learned from and improved on. The value of the existence of smaller groups with seemingly informal processes should not be underestimated within the sector, nor in a wider ‘Victims’ Forum’ or similar structure. If gaps are identified in the service they provide, efforts should be made to enable them to develop their capacity in appropriate ways.

Some groups have either the predisposition to or have already channelled their resources into capacity building in human and material terms to address specific areas of care. However, there is often an overlap displayed in the services that groups are equipped to offer. Irrespective of how broad an organisation’s range of work might be, the sector is very reliant on the strength of individual relationships. Consequently, individuals frequently choose to work with more than one group, thereby seeking to separate and organise the different forms of support they require into different organisations’ portfolios.

In the main, the sector considers that it can be divided into three core areas and the boundaries between these are often more permeable than rigid.

- *Advocacy work* – takes the form of governmental lobbying, media and other public awareness-raising programmes. For most this is linked

Core Functions of Victim/Survivor Groups



specifically to the criminal justice systems and in particular the advancement of legal action and to the pursuit of compensatory claims in relation to social welfare needs and increasingly in relation to memorialisation. This is often highly ideologically and politically motivated work.

- *Social networks of support* – is the principal requirement that many individuals have of the sector, valuing above all else the opportunity to ensure that befriending, fellowship and comradeship are maintained and developed within communities of interest. This work is carried out particularly by small, informal and *ad hoc* single-identity groups. In some cases, however, these activities are closely linked to advocacy work, or to the psycho-social therapeutic work described below.
- *Psycho-Social therapeutic and medical interventions* – professionally mediated social and medical contributions provide for the principal needs of some within the sector. These include clinical and non-clinical therapies.

Many organisations have developed a particular ethos and purpose catering adequately for needs that their

membership or users have prioritised. Many have identified the need to limit their work to a portfolio that simply provides opportunities for companionship. This regular and sustained way of connecting is held in particular esteem by the membership and considered just as important and beneficial for some as expert legal advice or psychotherapy is for others.

The value of smaller groups and the informal processes they provide should not be underestimated within the sector. If gaps are identified in service provision, efforts should be made to develop groups' capacity in appropriate ways and to seek partnerships which place relationships at their core.

At the centre of the sector's successes is an ability to build and sustain individual relationships. For many there is security and safety in knowing that their membership and staff have shared experience. In terms of shared working, the challenge for some groups in the sector is how to develop new relationships that recognise the plurality of loss.

4.2 Dominant Voices and Silent Voices

“On a societal level there has to be an allowance for people who don't want to

subscribe to the language of policy. Dissenting voices must be considered as equals. The difficulty of course is that dissenting voices are normally not unified – they are usually fragmented. This makes it difficult for them to form a robust opposition to the consensual group. The consensual group – government and society – therefore has a responsibility to acknowledge and include such dissenting voices.”

While there are a large number of strong and articulate voices representing some people in the sector, there are also many solitary voices.

There are also voices that feel themselves to be increasingly silenced. The political process, as well as inadequate welfare support provision and networks, have left several groups feeling abandoned by government representatives and former employers and, in some instances, by the communities they originally come from. Some groups who have contributed to discussions, consultations and research into the sector report having had their contributions edited or omitted. Groups feel that this has been in the interests of political expediency rather than as an oversight and has resulted in their particular concerns being absent from key debates. They welcome discussion around finding a way to draw voices together collectively without dishonouring their individual causes and experiences.

It is crucial that adequate time is allowed for all groups to discuss and debate their needs within the sector before policy and practice is set. It appears that all too often groups are steered into decision making on issues that they have not been enabled to adequately, or equally address (see Section 5). This is particularly so in relation to the medicalisation of trauma, commemoration and funding issues. Participants to the research felt that those with ‘stronger’ voices in the sector can influence and keep pace with the speed of policy developments, whereas those groups who are less well represented in the public arena are sometimes left behind. Despite this imbalance within the sector, all groups indicate a readiness and willingness to discuss and engage.

Some groups consider that they have not had support or encouragement to record their stories. Furthermore, while many needs assessments have been done (see Deloitte & Touche 2001; Capita 2003), it seems that a large number of groups have not been captured in those assessments. There is a weighty legacy of suspicion and fear, particularly among victims and survivors from the security force background who, like the families of the ‘On the Runs’ or those who have been otherwise displaced from their communities, have lived ‘in silence’ for the past number of years. While many individuals have actively chosen to develop a personal culture of silence (and this is particularly so for security services personnel and those attached to other armed groups), there are also specific categories of people who appeared less likely than others to take the opportunity to discuss their experiences.

Gender appears to be a significant variable in relation to people’s willingness to discuss the conflict. In some instances it is more significant than their ethnopolitical background. It is evident that women (particularly those in rural areas) tend to permit and sometimes expect men to speak on their behalf. It is also noticeable that men from both rural and urban areas are less likely than women to discuss events from an emotional perspective and prefer to consider their experiences as part of a wider political narrative.

An important factor for some is their geographical location. It would appear that some peoples’ expectations of what they are able to access are dictated by their location and in particular where they live in relation to urban areas. A theme that arises frequently is the rural/urban divide and that decision makers and funders are not fully aware of how different peoples’ experiences have been. This is particularly true for those living in the country in the border areas.

4.3 Support and Recommendations for a Forum

“We would welcome the opportunity for such a forum and to sit on it. This sector should be about moving on to a better future, but at present it is still very fragmented. Certainly,

given the deep divisions between and within communities, groups won't all agree on everything, but a start should be made at working together."

Groups are overwhelmingly supportive of the idea of the establishment of a Victims' Forum. They recognise its potential to appropriately develop the sector's work and advance community relations. Yet, in many instances, contributors to the research were adamant that they would only feel able to participate on the Forum if certain conditions were in place. They offered a variety of proposals as to how this might work:

- a Code of Conduct should be included in its Terms of Reference and be signed up to by all participating groups before the Forum sits;
- there should be an explicit imperative placed on the membership of the Forum to agree a mechanism to seek out, accommodate and give equal weight to the voices of individuals and small groups allied to the sector who do not have the capacity or resources to participate in the Forum;
- the Chair should rotate and be drawn from represented groups;
- thematic groups in relation to particular working areas should be constituted and able to co-opt;
- the Forum should meet in various locations with Belfast venues used for no more than half the meetings;
- the Forum should be guaranteed to have certain persuasive powers with regard to OFMDFM, Governmental policy developers and legislators in relation to the sector;
- the Forum should be constituted for action and not 'just another talking shop'; and
- meetings should be mediated and facilitated by someone who is considered above all, to be trustworthy⁴ and with no casting vote.

⁴ The issue of Trust in relation to the sector is considered at Section 5.2.

4.4 Readiness for Shared Working

"Eight or nine years ago, the only contact between groups on either side of the line would have been characterised by animosity. Over the last few years, however, the conflict resolution work that has been developing between these two communities is possibly some of the most powerful community relations work that has been going on in Northern Ireland."

There is already a great deal of inter-community work being undertaken by groups. This is often carried out quietly and discreetly for a variety of reasons. Many groups who have not yet undertaken to work together indicate they are ready to explore methods of working with other groups, both within their own and with other communities. There is a generosity of spirit in the sector. Irrespective of whether groups are yet able to work with one another, they appear as willing to recognise the good practice demonstrated by others as they are to identify the strengths of their own work. Groups demonstrated a measure of humility as well as realism when they indicated they are not always able to work alone to resolve all the issues that have developed for their client base.

All the groups who participated in the research see shared working being less problematic in some key areas than in others. Many of the groups who indicate a readiness to explore or to work with others are willing to do so on condition that such work would not take away from what they describe as their 'core values'. These core values are inevitably linked to a socio-political identity. To some extent, the expression of those values has become a euphemism for justifying the perpetuation of single identity work. If it is acknowledged that identity is a key element of victims' work, then it is crucial to also acknowledge that identity is intricately linked with the notions of trust and solidarity that groups have developed over time. Therefore, willingness to engage with other organisations can be an enormous challenge. Groups are often wary of disrupting the protocols and practices that have defined their activities and membership over the years, and of alienating the

people they serve. Consequently, several groups expressed a willingness to identify broader practical social justice issues, such as housing and water rates, as a starting point from which to address the more emotive and politically charged questions that they face. Some considered that the sector as a whole could jointly have a positive influence on the education system and on addressing trans-generational trauma with the potential for influencing the curriculum and encouraging an equitable form of learning about the impact of the Conflict. There is a sense that in the first instance this approach (namely consensual working on equal and human rights issues) might be less confrontational and less fraught than trying to convene a forum for shared working around the more controversial issues of truth-recovery, reconciliation and commemorations.

4.5 Barriers to Shared Working

“This work has been possible only because the individuals and small groups involved have developed trustful relationships with one another and they have got on with the work quietly and discreetly. Advertising or ‘shouting about’ the work could potentially upset that balance: some groups involved are well aware that certain parts of their own communities would target them if it were found out that they were working with ‘the other side’.”

Despite a willingness to move towards shared working, a number of barriers were identified that currently hamper this process:

- **Financial** – The way in which groups are able to access and source funding, as well as the amounts that are available to them, can impose expectations of shared working. Furthermore, funding sources can compel groups to ‘put on the victims’ hat’. Groups tend to resent this process, citing ‘disempowerment’, ‘feelings of compromise from our original purpose’ and ‘the embedding of victim/survivor/rescuer roles’ as causes of their antipathy. See section 4.8 for further discussion on this.
- **Structural** – The human and material resources of many groups are stretched with an over-reliance on volunteers. This can impact on service delivery and administration. This can limit who groups feel they should be and are able to service and how partnership working can be developed.
- **Sustainability** – Both the financial and the structural challenges groups face also impact on the sustainability of programmes and projects and can result in short-term working. A lack of continuity in programmes undermines and destabilises partnership working. The sector reports many instances of being ‘rewarded’ in funding applications for innovation, rather than being valued for the development of long-term relationship building and successful projects.
- **Geographical** – The practicalities of being able to traverse urban-rural divides, as well as cross-border and trans-national boundaries on occasions, creates challenges for many groups. Not least is the reticence that some of their users have for moving out of areas they consider to be safe spaces. There are also challenges in relation to access to public transport in rural areas, particularly so for older people, women, people living with disabilities, and their carers.
- **Culture and Communication** – Communities who have been educated, housed, employed and socialised separately have in many instances, (perhaps unsurprisingly), also developed different behavioural patterns in relation to communication. There are different community expectations and taboos related to engaging with sensitive issues in public settings and some groups suggest that transgressing these norms amounts to a betrayal of their ethos.

4.6 Recognition of the Trans-generational Impact of the Conflict

“We have left a terrible legacy to our children. Look at all the vandalism, the violence, the young so-called ‘scum bags’ who throw bottles on to the M1 and at the fire brigades. The

dependency on prescription medication and the increasing suicide rates. People ask why this is going on. Are you blind? We have given the children that legacy by our inability to relate to one another, even within families.”

There is widespread acknowledgement that the Conflict has both an inter-generational and a trans-generational dimension⁵, and that issues related to both are increasingly coming to the surface and are in need of attention.

For many, the coping mechanisms they employed at the height of the conflict, (which include, but not exclusively: distancing, avoidance, silence, unilateral acceptance, normalisation, resorting to prescription and non-prescription medication, and, in some cases, drug and alcohol dependency) are issues that have not yet been adequately addressed or worked through. This would appear to be particularly so for those who suppressed their emotional responses and whose traumas and losses they still feel are particularly attached to an ideological perspective. This often manifests itself in feelings of anxiety, hostility and negativity being directed at particular sections of society. There remains a focus within the sector for the funding of diversionary projects and what might be described as soft-edged ‘meet and greet’ community relations and community development initiatives rather than clinical therapeutic interventions or more robust challenges. Acknowledging the benefits of both approaches should not preclude the application of one or another.

The impact of poverty, disruption and physical, emotional and material loss as direct consequences of the conflict have had long-lasting implications for how families interact and what their life expectations are. The experiences and tragedies of previous generations are impacting on families and young people today in the area of education, as well as those of health and well-being. As noted in the Methodology, only just over one-third of the

organisations with whom we spoke have developed specific programmes for working with children and young people. The majority of organisations suggest they do not have the capacity in terms of human and other resources to meet legal and other criteria that would allow them to engage with young people under the age of 18. While this is a situation that is perhaps beyond the control of the majority of community-based organisations (who emphasise that they are already battling to meet the needs of their adult client base) it does highlight the fact that there are fewer resources available for working with children and young people than there are for working with adults. It also suggests that statutory support for the sector, in particular through the Trauma Advisory Panels, is particularly focussed on adults.

4.7 Complexity of Commemoration in a ‘Shared Future’

“Communities have to develop genuine respect for the ways in which other groups commemorate. At the same time, efforts need to be made to educate communities to show how commemorations can contribute to deeper division and loss, and to encourage them to reflect on the implications of this. This involves striking a delicate balance between protecting freedom of expression while at the same time resisting revisionism.”

Many groups see value in the idea of a shared space or focal point for commemoration of the conflict. However there was an overwhelming sense from respondents that it is ‘too soon’ for such a shared commemoration to be developed and not one of the groups questioned wanted to see more public money being spent on monuments or memorials. Organisations feel that their existing memorials and commemorative events need to be afforded space and respect. They consider that memorials and monuments should be ‘discreetly’ located; the fact that many groups’ memorial objects and spaces

⁵ For the purposes of this report when we refer to trans-generational issues, we rely on the understanding within the sector that *trans-generational* trauma is the response to trauma/loss/violence that is unspoken, carried in our bodies, and acted out of an unconscious ‘awareness’. *Inter-generational* trauma, by contrast, is linked to the verbal narrative, ‘*the story we are conscious of*’ (cf. Schutzenberger 1998).

'needed to be sought out' in the course of this research demonstrates that however they may be perceived from the outside, from the groups' perspectives, these are spaces for reflection rather than glorification.

The challenge for groups appears principally to be how to honour spaces where people want to have their memories preserved whilst at the same time demonstrating their acknowledgement that society is and should be becoming more pluralistic.

4.8 Funding Structures

"Those strategies and the funding allocated to peace and reconciliation with all of its criteria have created a situation where we have had containment these last ten years. Structurally – in terms of funding and policy perspectives – we need to stop maintaining or containing the situation, and start changing this situation."

As outlined in 4.5, many groups express frustration with narrow and prescriptive funding criteria and one frequent observation that was paraphrased by a number of groups was that *'it seems as though the funders have lost sight of the people'*.

Current funding structures and criteria are established to support the development of a value base held by the government/the European Union within what are perceived to be restrictive parameters of reconciliation. Furthermore, current structures require an understanding of fairly complicated financial management approaches. The time and resources dedicated to sourcing and retaining funding is considered all too often to detract from the actual support work being carried out by groups. This has had the result that groups feel when individuals have to repeatedly justify or prove their need, they end up losing faith in the structures available to them as a source of support and solace.

4.9 Accredited Training and Professionalisation

"Token counselling work – work which might tend to emphasise one single approach – can be helpful, but it is not appropriate for

addressing some the deep issues which people are presenting with."

The sector seems to have two distinct and opposing views as to whether or not service provision should be further professionalised and what impact this might have on existing groups. The extent of the need in a variety of areas for accredited training to be provided is a matter for further discussion in light of the ratio of counselling and support service providers to individuals currently seeking services. Some of the larger funded groups are increasingly able to provide accredited trainers and training courses for their membership to ensure that the help they provide is delivered within a particular framework. However, there seems to be concern that the current imbalances that exist between groups will be exacerbated if it emerges that some organisations are able to access as well as provide such training while others are not.

Familiarity with the experiences and life histories of staff and volunteers and the strength of long-term relationships are credited with providing members with:

- improved social interaction and communication skills,
- improved self esteem and confidence,
- reduction in stress and
- feelings of relaxation and a sense of well being.

Whereas working with unfamiliar facilitators has been reported as being:

- scary,
- unsettling and
- not conducive to opening up or baring your soul.

Members of groups that principally offer befriending services value the exceptional skills that volunteers and paid staff have developed in this area over the years. The service users and members are keen to ensure that this seemingly low-prestige work should be *complemented*, not replaced, by professionalised services. As the sector is becoming more aware of the status of accredited skills, medical models and clinical therapeutic interventions, the significance of groups that provide regular social gatherings or *ad hoc* companionship encounters is in danger of being undervalued.

4.10 Strategic Planning and Short-termism

“The importance of sustained work in this area is best understood in the context of ‘the bigger picture’. In the bigger picture our society has bigger needs – integration and economic regeneration, for example. As strategies for these needs are driven forward, communities will be hit with a big responsibility, and to date capacity has not been built in areas like this.”

The majority of groups indicate that much of their work is overly dependent on short-term planning in terms of funding and structural support. Groups feel that there is an implicit assumption made outside the sector that, “if you’re doing something right, you should be doing yourself out of a job”. Despite this, all of the groups consulted consider that their work is not coming to an end “as time passes”. The issues that the groups’ members grapple with and the services that they pursue are long-term in nature. Furthermore, there is overwhelming evidence to show that the problems and the trauma that people are dealing with have impacted upon their families, too.

4.11 Clarification on ‘A Shared Future’

“2.9. Ensuring that voice is given to the diverse victims of conflict on Northern Ireland, including via archives and victim-centred reconciliation events.” (OFMDFM 2005: 42)

“2.9.2. ...a strategy which will:

- provide a comprehensive approach to the provision of services for victims and survivors; and*
- ensure, through the appointment of a Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and the establishment of a victims’ and survivors’ forum, that services for victims and survivors are directed in a way which promotes the welfare of all those who have suffered as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland.” (OFMDFM 2005: 43)*

For some groups the limited reference (above) to victims and survivors in the “Shared Future”

document diminished their confidence in the strategy to deliver on their needs. Whilst the focus of “A Shared Future” is on more cross-community work, many individuals are concerned that this will negate the opportunities for the continuation of all single-identity work in the context of support for victims and survivors.

Groups have little understanding of what a ‘shared future’ might mean for the sector. They want to be given clear messages from Government and from organisations like the CRC as to what the implications of the strategy are for the sector.

Some groups express a need for community-based support in relation to trauma or losses that they have suffered as they are only now, ‘years down the line’, starting to ‘tell their stories’ and voice their fears. They feel that this can only be done within the safety of their own communities. Others are reluctant to engage with groups outside their own community of interest or geographical location and voice, since they feel that they are ‘unable to step outside of trusted circles’. Groups would like clarity on how they can continue to carry out work in safe spaces.

Moderate voices in the sector who consider that they are already engaged in cross-community work are disappointed. They feel they have not been consulted in relation to the *Shared Future* strategy. They are wary that decisions that will impact on them will be forged and forwarded in policy and practice terms without any direct consultation. More extreme voices in the sector find the suggestion of shared working unpalatable at this time. One group suggested that “there is a presupposition that we all want a ‘shared future’”, whilst another commented that “the British government [are choosing] to focus on fostering ‘good community relations’ as an alternative to establishing justice and equality”. These passionately held views, with roots in deeply painful personal experiences, were voiced on behalf of a sizeable minority.

It is noteworthy, however, that despite the apparent rigidity and reluctance of some to engage in shared working, groups who represent more fundamental

positions and who are drawn from different ethnopolitical traditions willingly participated in this research project knowing it was based on consensual decision making.

4.12 Areas for Further Discussion

Both in individual interviews and in collective discussions on the seminar day, groups highlighted that there are a number of themes on which they would like further discussion prior to any policy developments which might happen in the relevant areas. These included:

- “A Shared Future”
- Children and young people
- Resilience and supporting resilience
- Emotional v intellectual responses to the legacy of the Conflict
- Disillusionment with structures
- Trauma
- Medical vs. psychosocial responses to trauma
- Multiple trauma – including trans-generational issues and domestic abuse
- Retraumatization
- Relationships between the Community Relations Council, the Trauma Advisory Panels and other groups
- Seminar days for the Trauma Advisory Panels
- Moral equivalence between victims and perpetrators
- What is reconciliation?
- Language – clarity, euphemism, generalisation
- Politicisation of roles of key players e.g. perceptions of pro- and anti-state ‘ex-combatants’.

5. ANALYSIS

This section examines further some of the wider themes outlined in the findings.

As indicated in the Introduction (section 1), the research sought to explore groups' views on shared working, commemoration and trans-generational issues. While the questions of commemoration and the trans-generational impact of the Conflict are explored in detail in sections 5.4 and 5.5 respectively, the other themes discussed here are ones which emerged as important issues for the groups themselves and which have implications for the possibilities for and barriers to shared working in the sector.

5.1 Language, Definitions, Key Words and Concepts

“You mean, when does an ex-prisoner stop being an ex-prisoner and just be a human being? Language is a tricky part of all of that; we normalise that language and those labels for convenience and out of habit. We also take on labels for funding purposes...”

A key challenge in the research process was finding appropriate language and terms to address the questions relevant to people affected by the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland. Whereas debating semantics is often considered to be primarily an academic argument, groups expressed frustration at what they feel to be an ‘infantilisation’ of their sector. They emphasised that avoiding conversations about developing an accurate and acceptable set of terms hampers progress on the pressing issues in the sector – issues of truth, justice, acknowledgement and healing. One group made it clear that to shy away from the challenge of using accurate and acceptable language in the context of this research project would be to “rob the research of its value”.

The following are words used in material produced by both the statutory and community sector that the sample raised as problematic:

- ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’
- ‘paramilitary’ and ‘armed groups’
- ‘state forces’ and ‘state agents’
- ‘the Conflict’, ‘the War’ and ‘the Troubles’
- ‘survivor’

Additional concepts that came up frequently in the course of the research are ‘reconciliation’ (which is core to the sector’s activities in terms of funding and evaluation), the thorny questions of funding and sustainability, and the themes of ‘truth’ and ‘acknowledgement’. While this issue of definition has been flagged up in academic and policy documents in the past (Smyth 2003; Victims’ Unit 2002), little progress seems to have been made regarding these questions within the sector or on a service-provision level. This suggests that there is still an important debate to be had sooner rather than later about the parameters of these definitions both within the sector and externally – that is, within funding and statutory circles.

5.1.1 Victims

The report intends to avoid grafting certain concepts on to any understanding of what it is to be or to have been a victim. It thereby endorses the views of the majority of groups concerned that labels that ‘pathologise’ or ‘medicalise’ the individual’s experience and definitions which impose a hierarchy of victimhood are unhelpful. These views are corroborated by the literature explored in Section 3.2 (Summerfield 1998, 2000; Batniji 2006) which caution against categorising people’s responses to trauma and severe stress in medical terms and emphasise the value of community in supporting an

individual's recovery process. The research also sought to explore and acknowledge the experiences of victims of structural as well as physical and psychological violence.

Among the organisations consulted, many people rarely use the term 'victim' by choice. Some groups feel that the term is disempowering. Others insist that the term should be restricted to only 'innocent' victims. And, as indicated above, others emphasise that a nuanced appreciation of the experience of the effects of both physical and structural violence should be brought to bear on the use of the word 'victim' to ensure that the sector represents the broadest constituency possible in the local context. It is considered important by the participants to this research that some consensus should be reached with regard to how groups and individuals define themselves, the people that they work with and the people that they would find it difficult to work with. Whereas the issue of definition has been framed primarily within discussions around service delivery (see Smyth 2003; Bloomfield 1998), this perspective within the sector suggests that perhaps a certain amount of responsibility and potential lies with groups themselves to negotiate a consensus around problematic terms in the interests of shared working.

The following definition put forward in *Reshape, Rebuild, Achieve* (Victims Unit, 2002) offers an inclusive approach for beginning to thinking about who victims and survivors are:

"The surviving physically and psychologically injured of violent, conflict-related incidents and those close relatives or partners who care for them, along with those close relatives or partners who mourn their dead." (2002: 1)

It was broadly agreed by the sample that the inclusiveness implied by the definition is helpful and positive. When taken to a service-provision and support level, however, it became apparent that the definition does not acknowledge the tensions experienced on the ground between groups who see themselves as 'innocent victims' *vis à vis* those whom they define as 'perpetrator' groups. It does not address the issue that the application of certain terms are currently unacceptable to some organisations; that for some there is no such thing as an innocent victim, and that for others there is no such thing as a victim of circumstance.

A number of groups define themselves as 'innocent victims' united in their experience of 'terrorist' violence: these are often representative of those who feel their voices are being silenced, and whose key concern in the definition debate is the current lack of debate and acknowledgement of contentious words such as 'terrorist' and 'innocent victim'. Despite the fact that these themes have been introduced into the literature (Smyth 2003), they require further exploration both in the literature and among community groups. As one group put it: for them, the blurring of lines between victim and perpetrator amounts to "*drawing a moral equivalence*" between their positions, which to their mind is quite simply "*unacceptable*". While this last quote was drawn from a group that represents unionist/loyalist views, it can be equated to republican discourse in relation to the state.

Hierarchy of victimhood

It has been suggested that to quantify suffering is an impossible and inappropriate strategy for understanding human experiences of loss and trauma (Herman 2001), and in the local context, policy and

strategic documents have resisted outlining a graduated scale of victimhood (Victims' Unit 2002; OFMDFM 2005). Nevertheless, the majority of groups consulted confirmed their opinion that there is a hierarchy of victimhood in the wake of the Conflict in the sense that "*not everybody has suffered to the same extent*". They also commented frequently that "*perhaps to say that there is a hierarchy is not always a helpful thing, but it is true*". For many groups that describe themselves as 'innocent victims', there is a tendency to think in terms of a hierarchy that distinguishes between the experiences of those who carried arms (and, in the view of some, their families) and those who did not. Further to the distinction between armed and non-armed groups, there is the separation between pro- and anti-state groups.

These responses are supported to an extent in the literature by the suggestion that those engaged in combat are trained to expect violence and therefore can experience less intrusive symptoms and less emotional numbing than civilians who are less prepared (Johnson & Thompson 2007). By contrast with this theory, however, Cúnamh (Hamber 2005) has explored the long-term effects of traumatic experiences of certain republican ex-prisoners, and Spence (2002) has highlighted the challenges and losses borne by the families of loyalist ex-prisoners. Furthermore, Beyers (2007) on behalf of Coiste has recently demonstrated the appetite within the republican ex-prisoner community to find ways of engaging with other victims' organisations and to find areas of common experience and need.

The International Commission on Human Rights Policy (2000) presents a rigorous and nuanced framework for "*analysing the problem of how to encourage armed groups to respect human rights*". This consultation document specifically discusses the case of Northern Ireland, and when looked at in its entirety, might provide a valuable starting point for discussions around responsibility and for shared working between victims and ex-combatants from various backgrounds.

A Typology of Victims

To facilitate an understanding of the various groups' diverse perceptions of what it is to be or to have been a victim, a typology was developed over the course of the research on the basis of groups' comments and observations. It was suggested that victims of the conflict might be said to fall into four broad categories:

- Victims of paramilitary, sectarian and anti-state actions.
- Victims of actions taken by the state.
- People who have 'disappeared' or been disenfranchised in their own communities, been exiled or killed by 'their own side', or have otherwise vanished in unresolved circumstances.
- People who have been traumatised or suffered as a result of witnessing or otherwise incorporating and embedding violence in their psyche.

This typology is not intended as a prescriptive or exclusive list, but as a broad base-line or starting point for discussion on this theme. While the groups consulted did not consider the typology to be exhaustive, they agreed that the discussion it prompts is a necessary process in understanding the diversity of the sector.

5.1.2 Perpetrators

In talking about victims' needs, there is often a clear line drawn between 'victims' and 'perpetrators'. It is less clear whether the term 'perpetrator' is applicable to state and non-state armed groups, or whether it 'should be' applicable to those groups. This is reflected in international experience. However, even in the case of post-Apartheid South Africa, the burdens of responsibility and agency borne by perpetrators, bystanders and victims of violence and injustice are sometimes difficult to evaluate (see Verwoerd 2001).

It is beyond this report's remit to discuss whether actions taken on either side in the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland have been morally justifiable or not. Rather, as outlined above (see Introduction,

section 1), the aim here is to highlight obstacles to and possibilities for shared working between groups which have dramatically different perspectives. For many people, the term ‘perpetrator’ is a label that is borne with resentment. It communicates a sense of irredeemable guilt and ‘limits’ the individual’s identity into a single act or moment. The term ‘perpetrator’ does not take into account the complex human truth of the individual’s situation or the changes in his/her perspective that may have occurred since the commission of that act.

A group that represents ex-prisoners (i.e. individuals who would perhaps be most quickly categorised as ‘perpetrators’) explained that it considers many of its members to have been ‘victims’. The group emphasised that many people who have been singled out for crimes committed in the context of the Conflict have also suffered. Attention was drawn to the following points:

- many people have experienced structural violence and are therefore ‘victims of circumstance’,
- many endured indignities and physical violence while in prison (Murray 1998),
- some were falsely accused and
- many suffered losses as a result of state actions.

If these factors are acknowledged, it is possible to move away from seeing people locked into starkly divided ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ roles. This is a delicate conversation to have with people who can identify the individual who has caused the loss of a loved one or ‘ruined’ a life. It is, nevertheless, a conversation that needs to take place. This research has shown that the victims’ sector is not characterised by neat ‘black and white’ divisions and distinctions: while groups may at first glance seem to have nothing in common with one another, all the groups interviewed have identified that they have known what it is to *suffer* and to feel frustration and a sense of powerlessness. If the common experience of suffering or at least of loss – be it loss of loved ones, loss of community, or loss of time in the case of ex-prisoners – could be acknowledged across the ‘victim’-‘perpetrator’ divide, there may be opportunity for more shared working in the sector.

5.1.3 Combatants, Paramilitaries, State Actors and Armed Groups

Finding acceptable terms with which to describe individuals who have taken up arms either in defence of or opposition to the State is another thorny issue.

Former members of the Police or the Army and their families object to the use of the term ‘state *agents*’. It was felt this had a pejorative connotation, bringing to the fore allegations of collusion and underhand activities. It was suggested that the words ‘state employees’ or ‘state actors’ be used instead.

In terms of the distinction between armed groups, it was generally agreed that there are three groups of people who have taken up arms in the context of the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland and who therefore have roles to play in addressing the various needs of victims. They are:

- State employees or state actors (the RUC, the PSNI, Special Constables and the British Army, including the UDR).
- Pro-state activists (otherwise known as loyalist paramilitaries).
- Anti-state activists (or republican paramilitaries).

Several former state actors and their families voiced serious opposition to the grouping together of all armed groups under the single banner of ‘ex-combatants’. In their view, the roles cannot be considered on equal terms. For them, calling all of the armed groups the same term means not only that the actions of the non-state employees are “*elevated*” and edified in popular memory, but that the actions of the state employees are “*diminished*” and the memory of them is tarnished.

This is a sensitive issue that requires further conversation and consultation. There are currently successful dialogues and relationships being developed between people who define themselves as ‘ex-combatants’ from various sides of the community. However, it is clear from this research that there are groups for whom the way that those connections are framed is neither appropriate nor

acceptable, and who feel that they have been abandoned by their ‘official’ spokespeople in the course of this process. These groups constitute both individuals and family and community networks. The ongoing peace process cannot afford to ‘leave these groups behind’. A mutually satisfactory lexicon in which to frame the development of relationships between men and women who took up arms on all sides needs to be sought out because, as one group put it quite simply, “*we have a lot to learn from people who took up arms*”.

In writing this report, ‘armed groups’ has been decided upon as a suitably neutral term for designating the non-state employees who both defended and rose in opposition to the British State. This term is borrowed from the International Commission on Human Rights Policy (2000) referred to above in Section 5.1.1. The complexities of the Northern Irish situation are addressed in that document.

5.1.4 The Conflict/The War/The Troubles

In the course of this research, the term ‘the Conflict’ has been used to describe the various forms of violence that have affected the lives of thousands of people in the clash between unionism and nationalism.

The use of the term ‘the Conflict’ is privileged over the following:

- ‘The War’: the Ministry of Defence does not use this term in the local context. Several of the groups interviewed explained that this decision has had particular implications for soldiers and their families which have caused them frustration and anguish over the years, particularly with regard to issues of remembrance and social welfare.
- ‘The Troubles’: many interviewees consider this description to be euphemistic in designating what they have experienced as decades of “*pure horror*”.

‘The Conflict’, too, might be seen as a euphemism. This research respectfully acknowledges the indescribable proportions of people’s pain and suffering. Nevertheless, it also emphasises the need to

seek out common terms of reference within which this pain and suffering can be addressed. With this in mind, it has been concluded that ‘the Conflict’ is the most appropriate choice of term for the purposes of this report.

5.1.5 Survivors

People often need sustained and professional support to make sense of their loss or trauma and move past the stage where these things have a daily debilitating effect on their lives. Yet the experience of the majority of groups consulted shows that the transition from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’ “*depends on and comes from within the individual*” and neither can nor should be rushed as a process. Groups also emphasised that, in the main, people have developed various strategies and mechanisms for coping in the face of violence and loss. This perception is substantiated by Manktelow (2007) (see Section 3.3) and further explored below under ‘Resilience’ (Section 5.3.1).

It was repeatedly suggested that providing people with a *range* of appropriate facilities – from psychotherapy to befriending and practical skills development – is key. They can then choose from or identify with processes which “*enable them to say to themselves ‘how can I see and use my experiences as positive and empowering?’*” Consequently, both professional interventions and more low-key care structures are of value and need sustained support from funding and statutory bodies.

It is vital that this support should recognise that the shift from experiencing life as a victim to feeling like a survivor is “*not black and white*”; as one organisation put it: in relation to trauma, “*you don’t speak in terms of closure but in terms of the healthy integration of experiences*”. A person’s self-perception or ‘status’ as a victim or a survivor fluctuates because, as another group explained, these self-perceptions are linked to a person’s self-esteem, their physical well-being, their sense of hope for the future, and their personal emotional and financial security. All of the organisations consulted emphasised that trauma and its attendant complications for individuals is something that

unfolds and develops over time, and in the majority of instances, the literature that they provided us highlighted the fact that it is those organisations that are rooted within communities that are best placed to provide sustained and holistic support to individuals coping with these complications. Summerfield's (1998; 2000) work, explored in Section 3.2, underscores the value and appropriateness of this holistic approach internationally.

5.1.6 Reconciliation

The language of 'reconciliation' appears on a daily basis in policy rhetoric and determines funding for many groups. Despite this fact, however, 'reconciliation' is quite evidently not an explicit part of the work being undertaken in many community-based organisations. It does not stand out as a pressing issue for them.

This is not a blinkered refusal to engage with other communities; on the contrary, all of the groups consulted for this research expressed a willingness to hear the perspectives of other organisations and to share learning and skills in safe environments. That said, for some the idea of building bridges with other communities is still a step too far. Several organisations expressed astonishment at the unrealistic expectations of funding and statutory bodies which glibly require evidence of 'reconciliation' in project proposals and evaluations, pointing out that *"after all, Paisley and McGuinness only started speaking to one another a couple of months ago, didn't they?!"*

Other key reasons for the absence of the term 'reconciliation' in the approach taken by groups include:

- **A need for ongoing single identity work**

Some organisations are finding that they are only now scratching the surface of the so-called 'single-identity' work that is needed within communities.

They therefore still need to focus their energies inwards and to build capacity within their constituencies for healing and, perhaps eventually, for cross-community engagement. One support

group highlighted the fact that *"some of the oldest clients have only started availing of the services in recent years, decades after the end of their active service, highlighting the relevance and importance of providing a long-term and sustainable trauma support service. In fact, the national average time before seeking assistance is 14 years. The clients who need help the most are the ones who only come to us when they are at the end of their tether."*

- **Confusion around terminology**

Some organisations can demonstrate that their work has cross-community partnership and sharing as both goals and bi-products, but that to name it as 'reconciliation' work would put it under undue pressure, or perhaps take away from its integrity. This duality – the fact that, on one hand, the majority of groups do not prioritise the term 'reconciliation' in the way that they think of themselves or how they go about their work, whilst on the other hand their work effectively contributes to building capacity and confidence for cross-community engagement – suggests that, for all of the research and publications on the theme in recent years, groups are still asking *"what reconciliation really is"*.

Much has been written on reconciliation in both the local and international context (Hamber 1998; Hamber & Kelly 2004, 2005; Boraine 2000; Bloomfield *et al* 2003). Bloomfield *et al* (2003) gives a broad overview of various countries' approaches to the task of mending the fabric of society in post-conflict situations and explores the terminology and structures which have proved both successful and problematic in those reconciliation processes. In the local context, the *term* – the word itself – has become loaded with notions of closing the door on the painful past and getting along with former enemies with overtones and connotations of religiosity. Within and between groups, however, there seems to be a pragmatic realism about the *concept* that recognises that, as a process, reconciliation is not something that can be forced, contrived or reached by pursuing a prescribed course of action. This suggests that it might be helpful to develop discussions within and

between groups around their understanding of reconciliation using Hamber and Kelly's 'Working Definition of Reconciliation' (2005: 36-40) as a starting or reference point. While it draws on international experience, this definition is particularly helpful in that it is grounded in the local context.

5.1.7 Implications for Funding

“The whole policy and funding network tends towards reinforcing victim, perpetrator, bystander and rescuer roles, and these roles can become institutionalised. Being aware of these dynamics will assist us to move forward together in sustainable, equitable ways.”

The relevance of reaching consensus on appropriate terminology for the victims' sector is not limited to the practicalities of engaging groups from diverse backgrounds in collective debates and initiatives. There are also implications for how the sector is funded and otherwise supported.

The role of accurate language in this context is crucial: groups reported finding themselves obliged to adapt how they self-describe and the ways in which they operate in order to secure funding to provide their services. This inevitably has implications for the work that they do and the people with whom they are able to engage. A frequent observation was that *“a key problem in the planning and delivery of services is that programmes are often driven by the need to meet funding criteria rather than being genuinely needs-based”* – funding criteria that defines 'victims' and 'perpetrators' and requires evidence of 'reconciliation' (see above, Section 5.1.6). The following case study is illustrative:

Case Study

The group interviewed operates in an area of historic economic deprivation. Of the 167 people currently taking part in the project, 33 are unemployed, and 10 are only in part time employment. 118 of the participants have no qualifications. All of the participants are aged between 23 and 70. Whereas the multiple deprivations that exist within the community go back to severe inequalities that existed between the nationalist and unionist communities in the area, today the area indisputably constitutes a mix of republicans and loyalists. It frustrates the group sometimes that the organisation has to identify itself as a victims' group in order to get funding: the fact that it is a group working in a deprived area in the context of the aftermath of the Conflict doesn't seem to amount to the same in terms of funding criteria, even though there are surely people in the area who need help and yet who are afraid to come to a 'victims' organisation' for fear of stigmatisation.

Groups therefore indicated that a pressing task for an incoming Victims' Commissioner is to seek to establish consensus on appropriate and accurate terms and frames of reference in relation to funding structures.

5.1.8 Many Truths

“All we can say it that we know that people come in to us because a terrible wrong has been done to them, and they have not been told how, or why, or by whom, or sometimes even when.”

The groups interviewed agreed that victims have a right to know the truth of their circumstances (that is, the forensic details surrounding their individual losses or injuries). There was also, however, a broad sense of acknowledgement that *“everyone has their own perceptions and experiences”*. Forensic facts that the judicial system relies upon are, indisputably, *true* (and several groups are committed to vigorously excavating those truths to pursue legal justice), yet a common refrain from all the groups is an appeal that their experiences and the hurt and the loss that they have sustained be recognised officially by society and government.

5.1.9 Acknowledgement and Society

“The media and academia, too, ought to be held to account for their role in perpetuating and aggravating the pain of people who have been affected by that violence.”

This research suggested that leadership needs to be shown on a variety of levels to ensure that projects incorporate an acknowledgement that ‘other’ communities from diverse traditions have also suffered. If such leadership were to be shown ‘across the board’ (by government, funders, researchers, churches and the media) it would demonstrate that acknowledgement is not a question that exclusively concerns victims.

Much has been written on the value of acknowledgement in both the local and the international context. The links between acknowledgement of suffering and the restoration to ‘normalcy’ of a society in the wake of conflict are explored by Govier and Verwoerd (2002a, 2002b). They emphasise the necessity of building genuine trust between former enemies for developing an understanding of ‘the other’s’ sense of victimhood. Furthermore, Verwoerd (2001) suggests that even those individuals who may not have been actively involved in a conflict have a *“moral responsibility”* to acknowledge past violations, because they are *part of* a community that was party to the violence. In the local context, Healing Through Remembering (2006a) makes a significant contribution to current discussions

around acknowledgement and truth recovery and how these themes are linked to notions of victimhood, as well as to the needs and rights of victims and survivors.

The groups interviewed commented frequently that however uncomfortable the process is, telling and hearing their stories helps to ‘make sense’ of what has happened in the past. From a research perspective, a major incentive for encouraging broad-based self-reflexiveness and acknowledgement would be to generate a more open and informed approach to commemoration and trans-generational issues.

5.1.10 Acknowledgement and Confidence in the New Government

“Saying a personal sorry would go a long way to distancing themselves from what they have done by recognising that what they did was unjustifiable, but no one has had the courage or leadership to do that yet.”

The sample was unanimous in its call for gestures of acknowledgement of people’s losses, sacrifices and service committed to various causes, by members of the Assembly. International experience shows that offering acknowledgement of past wrongs is a particularly challenging task for governments, whether they have recently been defeated (see Verwoerd 2001) or have just emerged victorious over a previous regime (see the case of Zimbabwe in Bloomfield *et al* 2003: 34-39). Locally, the fact that the new Assembly has emerged as the result of a power-sharing agreement rather than a victory or defeat *per se* adds a particular dimension to expectations of the general population regarding the recognition of the experiences of civilians over the turbulent period that has led to this new dispensation.

The research revealed that there has been a crisis of confidence on all sides in Government’s ability to respond to and represent the needs of the people affected by the Conflict. This crisis of confidence is directly linked to the fact that people feel that they have not received appropriate or respectful acknowledgement of their contributions to the trials

and struggles of the last forty years. Other major factors contributing to this crisis of confidence include:

- the contentious process surrounding the appointment of the new Victims' Commissioner and
- the lack of consultation within the sector prior to the appointment in June 2007 of the Consultative Group mandated to look at ways of dealing with the past. Two groups from historically opposed backgrounds wanted to know *“Why did they not approach us and say ‘why don’t you get together and talk about what victims need’?”*

In its handling of these two issues, the new Government is thought to have not shown appropriate respect for or consultation with the *“people who have served them”* on both sides over the years. Moreover, it has failed to show proper acknowledgement of the skills and experience of those groups and individuals who coordinate expert and committed support and development in the victims' sector.

While people do acknowledge the positive aspects of progress which has been made on the political and economic fronts, they want decision makers to understand that just because things are ‘normal’ now does not mean that the issues related to the past are going to go away. On the contrary, one interviewee commented that *“I’m getting more flashbacks now because now things are normal and because I now have time to think back and reflect on all what happened...”* On several occasions research participants, unprompted, commented that images of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister shaking hands and smiling side by side on the steps of Stormont made them reflect on their own sacrifices. Some people saw this only as political expediency and felt that the images could not be viewed as a positive indication of ‘a shared future’. They wanted the political leadership to acknowledge their roles in perpetuating the conflict which resulted in the colossal sacrifices and losses made by the public.

5.2 Relationships and Trust-building

The members present all underlined how much they love being part of the group. They say that they find great companionship here, and look forward to the meetings. They think of each other as “one big family; everyone’s very caring”. Trust is a key element of this relationship; as one member put it, “it’s nice to know there’s not a stranger among us”.

Professional qualifications are vital for understanding and treating trauma, and this research recommends that additional resources should be dedicated to the delivery of accredited training and service delivery in this area. As other research has evidenced, however, there is no substitute for the trust and solidarity that comes of sharing similar experiences, of growing up in a certain area, working or living with like-minded people and of otherwise being intimately connected through good times and bad over a number of years. For many people there is solace in the knowledge that they don’t have to tell their story over again because their companions already *know*; for others, there is safety in knowing that they *can* tell their stories in company that will not betray their confidences, will not judge them, and will not expose their fragility to outsiders.

Donnan & Simpson (2007) note how people on whom the conflict has impacted, often become isolated, both in rural and urban communities (although to a greater extent in the former). They describe *“...the singularity of suffering and how it unfastens the individual from everyday social relations, ‘hyperindividuating’ them and locking them into a world that they frequently seem unable to communicate to others, and that others seem unable to ‘share’”* (2007: 5) (see also Herman 1992). Informal befriending groups play a crucial role in helping people to address this sort of isolation and to link them into networks of support.

Not surprisingly, therefore, trust – or a lack of trust – remains a problematic issue for many organisations. A frequent observation made by groups was that

neutral and competent facilitation of encounters with other groups and communities would encourage participation, but that the process of generating genuine trust is long and slow.

5.2.1 Willingness to Engage

“Difficult conversations need to be had: there is no point in putting a blanket over the past or rewriting history.”

Having noted the caution which surrounds ‘reconciliation work’ *per se*, there is nevertheless a deep resolve within those groups that find it tough to meet with organisations from diverse backgrounds and to discuss painful differences to rise to those challenges. There is a prevailing awareness of the timeliness of such engagement, however difficult, in the current context. As one group put it: *“even if it rattles cages, things like this need to be discussed and pursued; otherwise we will never move forward. It is a step in the right direction.”* This attitude is linked to an overwhelming sense of the need to ‘connect’, both within and between communities – to break the patterns of isolation and silence that have characterised so many peoples’ experience of the last forty years, and to ensure that the stories and the learning are not lost to this and future generations.

An important dimension to this willingness to engage is the loyalty and trust described above that exists within organisations. Representatives of the groups consulted in this research often pointed out that they would only undertake a project or take steps towards other groups when everyone in their organisation was ready for that move. This observation harks back both to the ongoing need for capacity building within a single-identity context and to the need for strong, agile and sensitive facilitation of both single- and cross-community encounters. The latter is a challenge not only for a future Commissioner for the victims’ sector, but also for community workers and researchers; as one organisation stated, *“the excuse that certain groups are ‘hard to reach’ and that people are ‘unable to engage’ with certain groups has been used for years. It depends on who is reaching out: if there is a genuine desire to connect with people, it happens.”*

5.3 Networks of Support

“People generally do cope. We should value that. But we should also check in from time to time to make sure that how they are coping is healthy – and community groups are the only ones in a position to do that.”

5.3.1 Resilience

The capacity to ‘cope’ should be acknowledged and celebrated. A key theme which emerged in the research discussions was the apparent resilience of individuals and communities affected by the Conflict and the variety of coping mechanisms they employed (Manktelow 2007). Groups’ experience of supporting individuals and communities responding to trauma demonstrates respect for these coping mechanisms, whilst at the same time highlighting the fact that in many cases, the ‘remedies’ resorted to failed to take into account (or relieve) the wider social determinants of health. It also had some part to play in the development of addictions which in turn are considered to have had negative inter-family and inter-generational ramifications, including increased abuse and physical violence. (Mankeltow 2007; Schlindwein 2000; Gallagher 2004).

5.3.2 Well-being and Sustainability

“The challenge for workers is to be with people in a way that allows you to stay resourced, yourself, while at the same time supporting them.”

The sample demonstrated a commendable commitment to and faith in its members and staff, often in the face of funding and other resourcing issues, that should serve as an inspiration to the statutory sector in the context of ‘A Shared Future’. But whereas the well-being of clients and staff is the primary concern within groups, many expressed a sense of frustration at not being able to adequately support their work force and volunteers when resources are already stretched. As noted in the Literature Review (Section 3) the Community Relations Council (2003) is cognisant that these

concerns require further recognition from and investigation by statutory and funding bodies. Two different Project Co-ordinators underlined the issue of ‘caring for carers’ in unequivocal terms:

“My main concern is the health and well-being of our staff. They have children, mortgages, lives outside of their work – stressful lives! But we are requiring them to deliver a service of wellness when they come in here. In the sector as a whole we need something more concrete; we need to afford our workers more consistency and respect.”

“Crucially, workers in this sector need a lot of support. Lack of strategic funding and short term approaches are very frustrating elements for those people who are committed to working consistently in this area.”

Problematic aspects of current funding structures have already been explored above (see point 5.2.1.). Nevertheless, the negative implications of limiting approaches to dealing with the impact of the Conflict on individuals and communities to the short term cannot be overestimated. The majority of organisations consulted commented that, to date, policy makers have sought to “contain victims’ issues” rather than to resolve them. Groups expressed anxiety that, given the recent advances in the political peace process, the Government will be seeking out “quick-fix” solutions to their grievances – as one group put it, “the Government seems to want to wash its hands of the victims’ issue, whereas it is an area that is going to need sustained support for years to come.” ‘Quick-fix’ strategies would not only fail to adequately address the issues which will continue to affect the lives of both direct and indirect victims of the Conflict for years to come; they would also cause people to lose all faith in their government to represent and protect their needs.

5.4 Commemoration and Memorialisation

Remembrance is a key element of groups’ activities and purpose. Without exception, the organisations consulted highlighted the importance of the provision of space and time for individuals and communities to

commemorate loved ones in safety. Perhaps because commemoration and memorialisation are, to an extent, self-conscious and often carefully choreographed parts of their activity (Brown 2007), groups were readily able to identify some of their needs and apprehensions in the changing context, and looking ahead to ‘A Shared Future’.

5.4.1 The Purpose of Remembrance

Processes and rituals of remembrance are an important part of how organisations define their identities and purpose insofar as they are the place where the groups’ histories are explained and preserved. When they were asked what they felt the purpose of commemorative activities and physical memorials is, groups articulated a range of ideas including the following:

- *“To hold the sacrifices made by loved ones in honour and respect.”*
- *“To ensure that the sacrifices and suffering of the past are not forgotten.”*
- *“To communicate the message that “never again” should such loss be suffered.”*
- *“To ensure that the stories and experiences of the past are not lost to our own and future generations: to keep the stories alive.”*
- *“To provide solace and comfort for those that have experienced pain, trauma and loss.”*
- *“To celebrate the lives of those who died as a result of the conflict, and to remember the good times that were shared with them.”*
- *In the case of memorials: “to provide a visual focus and in some cases a beautiful physical place for remembrance and peaceful reflection.”*

As noted in the Literature Review, Brown (2007) and the CAIN resource are making valuable contributions to the documentation and critical understanding of the wealth of commemorative projects and physical memorials in Northern Ireland.

5.4.2 Private and Public Commemoration

“Embedded ways of commemorating and memorialising in this society have continued to

create separation and conflict and will continue to do so if they are not engaged with constructively. There is a lot of work that needs to be done; it may not be achieved in this or even the next generation, but this should not deter people from starting the work of developing ways of 'healing through remembering' ”.

The organisations consulted were in agreement that commemoration understood in these terms happens on three levels:

- private – on an individual level, or within a family;
- community – within what would be called a 'single-identity' group within a neighbourhood or town; and
- public – involving the free participation of large numbers of groups across the country.

Key to their understanding was that commemoration is something that people do *freely* and first and foremost in their own private way every day of their lives. The groups interviewed emphasised that *“people cannot be told how they should or should not remember their loved ones”*. As such, remembrance or commemoration of important dates is not an obligation or a task: it is something that individuals and groups feel compelled to do and which constantly affirms and shapes their own identities. In the words of one interviewee, *“these are important days for individuals, and days to keep us together as a community. I don't know whether they help with healing, but if they were taken away or disrupted, that would be hurtful.”* If there is any sense of obligation involved, it is born of respect and a desire to 'do the right thing' morally. For example, one group pointed out that *“with the generations moving on, part of the group's role today is to ensure that the graves of their old friends and colleagues continue to be well cared for”*.

Public commemoration and the erection of memorials in the local context continue to be characterised by division (Brown 2007) and in many cases outright sectarian and political antagonism. The groups were unanimous in their condemnation of disruption and desecration of public processes and monuments. At

the same time, however, all of them articulated the view that commemoration in this climate requires a responsible level of engagement. As one group put it:

“We need to cultivate a culture of respect for these community memorials and commemorations; this respect should be two-sided:

- a) those who put them up should be mindful of the reaction that they might cause in other circles/communities, and*
- b) 'other' groups should be mindful of how important it is to that community to commemorate in their own way.”*

5.4.3 The Role of Education

An important theme which emerged was the role of education in cultivating this 'culture of respect'. Many groups pointed out that a fair amount of the trouble linked with particular events and memorials is caused by people – often young people – who do not understand what those events and memorials are about. A frequent observation was *“for the vast majority of the people in this area, the date means nothing; it is simply an opportunity to cause a bit of trouble”*. Those organisations feel that this *“demonstrates a particular issue: people here do not know their own identity”*. This is a problem that needs to be engaged with taking into account structural inequalities – not only those which have existed historically but also those which have emerged in the course of the political and economic changes over the last several years.

5.4.4 'Sharing' and Commemoration

In light of the above, the sample was understandably wary of the implications of 'A Shared Future' for their commemorative processes and memorials. There was unanimous insistence that groups should be allowed to continue to hold their commemoration events and to erect memorials within their communities if they wish to do so, provided they seek appropriate planning permission for monuments and do not wilfully or otherwise antagonise other people. Several organisations commented that the approaches

to commemoration within republican and unionist circles differ greatly, and that the “*particular liturgy and theatre*” that has been developed by each community respectively would not easily lend itself to shared processes. A major concern was that in the event of shared commemoration and memorials groups would be forced to compromise these aspects of their identity.

This research was carried out shortly after the ‘Day of Private Reflection’ piloted by Healing Through Remembering on 21 June 2007. Many of the groups consulted volunteered comment on the initiative. Several had marked the day, for example by making available a quiet space for their members to reflect on the past. The sample’s feeling on the initiative was, however, mixed. Reservations were expressed on two levels:

- with regard to its timeliness – that it was perhaps ‘too soon’ for such a project. It should be noted, however, that this was not a categorical ‘no’ vote in respect of the Day: when groups said that they felt it was too soon for a collective day or reflection, and observation that frequently followed was “*but if you don’t begin to tell the story, you begin to lose the story.*”
- with regard to its relevance – the majority of groups pointed out somewhat indignantly that “*every day of our life is a remembrance day*”.

The sample’s response to this initiative therefore indicated that if a collective Day of Reflection is to be pursued as a fixed calendar date, a great deal more consultation and conversation around its purpose and ethos needs to be carried out within the victims’ sector.

5.4.5 A Memorial to ‘The Troubles’

Similarly, the prospect of a single shared memorial to the Troubles was met with ambivalence, if not opposition. Groups did comment, however, that there would be merit in such a project insofar as it could provide a shared point of focus or reference for everybody. It was made clear that any such monument or memorial space would have to be conceived in conversation with victims’ groups: a

frequent comment in connection with the idea of a shared memorial was “*it depends on who is proposing it*”. There was a strong sense of resistance to any such project being initiated and carried forward by Government in the current context. Groups are wary that the new OFMDFM could consider it expedient to press ahead with a shared commemorative project to symbolically close the door on the past and usher in a ‘shared future’ exclusively on their terms, leaving the rest of civic society feeling no more secure or at peace with the past than before (see point 5.1.8 above).

Groups also pointed out that the Conflict was not experienced in the same way by everyone in Northern Ireland, and that even within strong single-identity groups there has been a broad spectrum of experiences and nuanced shifts in motivation and belief. This is a view strongly supported by the work of Donnan and Simpson (2007), who demonstrate that, for example, there is a massive gap between the experiences of the Protestants in Belfast, in the far north, those who live along the border, and those who live on the border in South Armagh. The narrative of dominance and strength that prevails among urban voting Protestants is not reflective of the experiences, feelings, situation, or history of the border Protestants. This raises the question of the ultimate relevance of a collective memorial to the Conflict, and whether it could do justice to the plurality of experiences that it would be expected to capture.

5.4.6 Purpose and Shape of an ‘Inclusive’ Memorial

“The majority of people that you talk to don’t want names on stones, or gardens, or ‘days of reflection’. They reflect every single day on their loss and their pain; they want a way to move forward. They want something that can tell their story, long after they are gone.”

Insofar as a physical monument or memorial garden is concerned, the majority – although not all – of the groups felt that it would be inappropriate and unacceptable to have the names of *all* of the people who have lost their lives in the course of the conflict

inscribed or recorded in the same place⁶. On one level this response links into the issues of definition and labelling broached above (see the Introduction, Section 1, and point 5.1 above, particularly the point on drawing ‘moral equivalence’ between victims and perpetrators of violence). On another level it raises a practical question regarding the purpose of such a collective monument. For example, the people whose loved ones a memorial commemorates might not feel comfortable or safe visiting the memorial for fear of encountering people who may be thought of as responsible for their loss. If this is the case, then *who* would that monument ultimately be *for*? As one group pointed out, “*memorials are not for the people who have died, they are for the people who are still living*”. If the people who are still living cannot comfortably avail of the memorial space to remember and honour their lost loved ones, then the commemorative project loses its meaning altogether.

Brown (2007) demonstrates that although commemoration and memorialisation are primarily acts of remembrance for people who have died (see also Leonard 1997), and therefore acts of mourning, they are also frequently invested with political significance or incorporated into political projects. Conversations held with academics and practitioners in the course of this research revealed broad agreement that commemorative processes and memorials have not only played a role in exacerbating fraught relationships between communities in the past, but continue to do so today. Moreover, as highlighted in the Literature Review (Section 3), remembrance and memorialisation in their various forms can play a role in contributing to the embedding of narratives of the Conflict, and of resistance and victimhood within identity groups, thereby playing a key part in the transmission of sectarian values across generations (Save the Children 2004; Peake 2001).

It is vital that in the current situation, with devolved government, power-sharing and new policing structures, that a deeper understanding of the power

and impact of commemoration on communities and especially on young people is developed. Investigation is needed to gain a more nuanced appreciation of how processes of commemoration, in both single-identity and collective forms, relate to real and perceived structures of authority within communities and how these affect the way in which people relate and respond to municipal and political authority.

5.4.7 Cost and Value of a Commemorative Project

Related to the theme of naming the lost, a number of groups said that “*we already have a collective memorial: ‘Lost Lives’*” (McKitterick *et al.* 1999). They highlighted this book as an appropriate memorial to the troubles which is both “*inclusive and accepted across the communities as a work of some integrity*”. Moreover, it is “*already there, so it won’t cost anything more to produce*”. The sample was strongly opposed to the thought of large amounts of public money being spent on any new collective memorials. This suggests that, for the practitioners and support workers interviewed, the value of public memorialisation and the shape that memorials take must be set against the backdrop of the myriad practical needs of direct and indirect victims of the Conflict. For these people, the notion of solace is an important one in relation to dedicating space and time to commemoration.

Many of the groups interviewed operate in areas of economic deprivation where adults and young people see very little potential for their personal development. In these circumstances, “*it is important to create a beautiful space for people. Creating bright and beautiful spaces that everyone can access shows respect for every individual: it says to each person ‘you are good enough and deserving of this’*”. Reiterating the point that memorials are for the benefit of the living rather than for those who have died, this observation highlights the fact that commemoration in the local context should be approached as an

⁶ That said, this project acknowledges that some groups have reached agreement within their membership as to how to include the names of people from a diverse range of backgrounds in their memorial projects.

integrated part of how communities are resourced and developed in practical terms and not simply as a political or religious question.

5.4.8 Remembrance for the Future

Seen in this light, commemoration is not about closing a chapter on the past but it is a part of the ongoing peace process and part of the future. As one interviewee commented, *“it is important to remember that, as long as we are putting up physical memorials, these visual and concrete things will impact on how our children grow up and on how people behave. Is this the route to developing a lasting peace?”* This observation demonstrates a link between the themes of remembrance and the trans-generational impact of the Conflict, highlighting commemoration as a theme regarding which the Government needs to seek frank and vigorous consultation with the victims’ sector.

5.5 The Trans-generational Dimension of the Conflict

“The residue of the conflict – the aggression, dependency on medication and mental health issues – needs to be dealt with honestly.”

All of the groups consulted highlighted the fact that the Conflict has a trans-generational dimension, and that signs of this trans-generational impact are rife today. Some groups suggested that the victims’ typology (Section 5.1.1) should include certain children and young people. One community project noted that it has seen an increase in young people, particularly young males, presenting for emotional support and help with anger management. Young people in this project have identified a number of issues that affect them including *“low self esteem amongst young people, poor job prospects and an alarming increase in suicide rates”*. The coordinators of this and several other projects insist that there is a link between these issues today and the Conflict, saying that they would consider many of the young people who grapple with these issues to be indirect victims of the Conflict.

5.5.1 Families, Secrets and Trauma

“We have to support those people who were very young when their parents/siblings/friends were killed, or they themselves were injured, and who therefore have ‘frontline’ traumatic experiences which need to be addressed. But we also need to support their children. Their parenting and relational skills have been impacted by those experiences, meaning that the next generation has a distorted understanding of what constitutes ‘normal’ relationships.”

The sample’s experience shows that when talking about children inter-generational trauma there are many people that need to be taken into account. Several organisations highlighted situations where people have not been adequately supported in the aftermath of a traumatic incident. For many of those people, *“it is only now that they are realising what all they went through”*. Others have still not acknowledged the magnitude of their experiences, often because if they had not just battled forward, their lives and families as they knew them would have collapsed altogether.

A key issue for many families has been that expectations and responsibilities have of necessity been shared out differently between family members over the years. It is noteworthy that shifting gender expectations are particularly evident in those families who adjust to living with disabilities, death, imprisonment or the reintegration of certain members of the family after long absences. In these instances, previously accepted gender roles are often switched, with the security of clear cut ‘breadwinner versus homemaker’ roles for some turned upside down (Morgan (1996)).

Admirable as it is (see the discussion on ‘Resilience’ above in Section 5.3.1), the ‘life goes on’ mentality which characterises the strength and resilience of many parts of this society also has a negative side. Many organisations describe unhealthy coping mechanisms among their clients and members,

including excessive consumption of alcohol and dependency on prescription medication. When these factors are coupled with anger issues related to traumatic incidents in the past and feelings of disempowerment in the present, *“this means that there are many homes that are angry and volatile places for children to grow up in”*. Several support and counselling organisations consulted cited domestic abuse as a current concern among their client/member base.

Young people are therefore in an extremely vulnerable position. Some have grown up having to keep family secrets – to lie about what jobs their parents or carers had, for example, so as not to reveal their affiliations to the State or to a particular organisation – while others have never been able to spend time as a family because of the dangers and commitments that have shaped their parents’ lives. As one group explained, *“children carry things on behalf of their families – for example, some children are the ones in the family who will always check that windows and doors are closed at night. And many children even carry what isn’t being spoken about in the family.”* Another group commented that *“the impact on families of living with secrets has taken a toll. We all accepted restraints as part of life, but it has been a great relief in the past few years to relax.”*

5.5.2 Honouring Loyalty

The complicated mixture of resentment and loyalty that children growing up under such circumstances feel towards their parents can result in long-term emotional anxiety that requires, as one support group put it, *“a tender approach”*:

“These are people who need to be told – tenderly – that their upbringing has been inadequate. They need to be told tenderly because it must be respected that they do not want to be disloyal to their parents – who, often absent, will frequently be idealised in their children’s imagination. This is important for young adults and new families: if your needs weren’t met when you were growing up, it is going to be hard as a young parent for you to recognise certain needs that your child has.”

This raises the point that in some cases families are now seeing the birth of the *second* generation of children since the most intense period of the Conflict.

There is therefore a whole new generation growing up in the long shadow of these issues. In this context the importance of programmes for young adults and new parents that address, directly and indirectly, the trans-generational impact of the Conflict is necessary, and should be supported in the long term. As one interviewee articulated it, *“parents and adults need extraordinary skills for extraordinary circumstances. Such training aims to provide them with a greater sense of “choicefulness” so that they don’t have to go on simply ‘reliving’ their experiences.”*

5.5.3 “Woundedness is evident everywhere”

“There is often a stigma which goes with living in certain areas in Northern Ireland which have been consistently associated with the Troubles. Carrying that stigma as your community’s identity is part of what it means to ‘be victimised’. Acknowledging that you have grown up in such a difficult area can be a relief to people, and can be a step towards building up their self esteem.”

A key message drawn from several interviews was the link between the development of healthy coping mechanisms (on both an individual and community level) and building up confidence and self esteem. Herman’s (2001) work highlights the logic of this link, observing that traumatic events or periods *“breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of self that is formed and sustained in relation to others”* (2001: 51).

An individual’s and a community’s sense of self-possession, self worth and courage for facing the present and the future can be understood as essential prerequisites for tackling and breaking the trans-generational cycles of trauma and distrust. Groups constantly highlighted the relative paucity of counselling and other services in the areas which need them the most: areas which have either been historically deprived of resources, or those whose

inhabitants, because of population movements and economic changes in recent decades, have no real binding community identity other than their infamy for violence, unemployment, crime, joyriding, affiliations to armed groups or general poverty. Breaking through this is a considerable challenge for community workers and is a crucial step towards finding opportunities for shared working with groups in other areas.

The following observation captures the mood of the majority of organisations consulted when they were asked to comment on the trans-generational impact of the Conflict.

“Communities have survived, so people most certainly have the right to call themselves survivors. But that cannot take away from the fact that there is still a weighty burden being carried by those communities: woundedness is evident everywhere in the abuse of alcohol and drugs, and in the violence and antisocial behaviour.”

Once again, Herman (2001) corroborates this local awareness with a more general observation that “[t]he knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level” (2001: 2). There is a tension between groups’ encouragement and celebration of their members’ resilience and healing, on the one hand, and their acute awareness of the need to engage honestly with the complex long-term and trans-generational issues that the Conflict has given rise to, on the other hand. The ‘woundedness’ described by groups – the rising levels of prescription drug dependency, increasing incidences of alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence and self harm and completed suicides – should not be the norm for this society. This complicated ‘woundedness’ and its trans-generational dimension need to be acknowledged if routes to shared working are to be identified and explored.

6. CONCLUSION

This report has attempted to draw together the diverse voices of a range of groups currently operating in the Sector. The focus has been on three key areas:

- sharing a future by way of shared working in terms of policy and practice;
- trans-generational issues related to the Conflict and its legacy; and
- commemoration and memorialisation.

The Methodology (Section 2) demonstrated that the aim of the research process was to give as equal a voice as possible to the views and concerns of the diverse groups consulted. While precedence has been given to the inclusion of the opinions and feelings of those community-based organisations, in the Literature Review (Section 3) and the Analysis (Section 5) the main themes they raised have been contextualised within the growing body of local and international literature which considers victim and survivor issues of relevance to the local situation. The Findings (Section 4) highlighted twelve key areas of common interest and concern to groups which emerged from the consultation process. These findings have been contextualised in a wider discussion and analysis of five themes that groups identified as significant areas of concern: language, definitions and key words; relationships and trust-building; networks of support; commemoration; and trans-generational issues (Section 5).

The research has established that however long the process might take, there is an immense amount of work that still needs to be done for policy and legislation in relation to the Conflict to be developed in a way that will genuinely contribute to a healed society and be representative and inclusive of the Sector's needs. Recommendations informed by the Sector have been made in relation to how this work

might be undertaken by Government, by a Victims' Commissioner, and by community-based groups within the Sector (see below). There are imperatives on individuals and communities to ensure that this process is undertaken with a view to acknowledging past wrongs and ensuring that mistakes are not repeated, rather than as something that is timely and expedient in a purely political sense. Similarly, the process should not be stalled or abandoned: even if many of the most difficult questions raised by the Sector cannot be resolved definitively, they must at least be addressed in a transparent and respectful way.

This report has identified and raised more questions than it has suggested answers to those challenges. The key observation in this process, however, has been that it is only by working collectively with communities at the core of that work that appropriate solutions to the various needs and difficulties of the Sector are going to be found. The Sector's community groups need to be empowered and their capacity strengthened to enable them to feed into debates about shared working. There is an imperative on both statutory and non-statutory organisations to strengthen communication and networks of support for the benefit of this and future generations.

The research has demonstrated that there are not yet any easy answers regarding questions as to what shape acknowledgement and reconciliation 'should' take in the local context, or regarding how to commemorate or how to break cycles of trans- and inter-generational trauma. Its Findings have identified, however, that there is a tremendous willingness and readiness across the Sector to seek appropriate mechanisms with which to tackle these challenges safely.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on an analysis of the research findings and the literature documented in this report. They have been collated into three sections and presented as fifteen recommendations for Government, seven for an incoming Victims' Commissioner and seven for community-based sectoral groups.

7.1 Recommendations for Government

The recommendations for Government fall into broad thematic areas that do not fit the remit of one specific department alone. The recommendations point to the value of joined-up and inter-departmental working when seeking out ways to meet the needs of people affected by the Conflict. It is recommended that the Government consult with and involve the sector in advancing such work.

Education

- 7.1.1 A review of the curriculum should be carried out, particularly in the areas of History, Citizenship and Personal Development, to ensure that these include an acknowledgement of the complexity of and paradoxes within local history and society.
- 7.1.2 Teachers and trainee teachers should be supported further through teacher training colleges and the Education and Library Boards to be sensitive to the sector when addressing challenging issues related to divided communities and the complex narratives of the Conflict in the classroom.

Media

- 7.1.3 Existing media guidelines around reporting on issues related to the Conflict should be re-examined within the context of the growing understanding of the trans-generational impact of the Conflict. Protocols should be revisited around the way in which Conflict-related stories are portrayed.

Arts and Culture

- 7.1.4 The continuation of the rich portfolio of arts projects, exhibitions, festivals and materials supported by the Government and district and city councils should be encouraged as a process of acknowledging and engaging with the legacy of the Conflict. Consideration should be given to composing a short phrase or declaration to appear on all supporting literature that would present information about alternative perspectives on the themes being addressed. This might read along the lines of "The artist and sponsors attached to this event extend their thoughts to all those for whom this production resonates and acknowledge the significance of the losses experienced in all communities."
- 7.1.5 Government should work closely with organisations and individuals commissioning and supporting conflict-related public art works and memorials to ensure that communities are adequately consulted about the installation of challenging or provocative objects or displays.

Funding

7.1.6 Funding and evaluation criteria should be developed with a view to motivating and holding to account those groups that are well resourced and strongly represented in the sector to develop links with groups and individuals that are less well resourced and less confident.

7.1.7 Funding and evaluation criteria should support the initiation and ongoing development of community-based projects that incorporate an acknowledgement of the perspectives and experiences of communities from other backgrounds in the context of the Conflict and its legacy.

Social Welfare

7.1.8 Qualitative research should be undertaken into the local challenges and international precedents involved in developing ways of working in the sector that are proofed on the basis of human rights and equality .

7.1.9 The perspectives of people affected by the Conflict should be specifically sought out and respected in the course of any Equality Impact Assessment (EQUIA) or other consultations carried out on behalf of Government. .

Health

7.1.10 Resources should be made available for the development and delivery of standardised and accredited training courses for all community-based practitioners providing therapeutic interventions such as counselling and complementary therapies. These training programmes should be

designed and delivered with a view to developing links between community-based groups from diverse backgrounds who identify similar needs within their client base/membership.

7.1.11 Resources should be made available for the development and delivery on demand of family therapy and other family support structures. These and other therapeutic services should be made available in neutral public environments, i.e. not only in the context of community-based groups.

7.1.12 There should be official recognition of the value of low-key support and befriending services as actions which complement professional therapeutic interventions.

7.1.13 There is a need for a public health campaign to raise awareness of the long term and trans-generational effects of trauma and to destigmatise the process of seeking support for conflict-related issues

Development of Sites of Significance

7.1.14 There should be clear protocols for communication with the sector about plans for the restoration, regeneration or dismantling of buildings and fixtures in public spaces to ascertain their significance to people affected by the Conflict.

7.1.15 If sites identified for regeneration are discovered to be of significance to people affected by the Conflict, the needs and perspectives of those people should be taken into account in deciding how to proceed with the regeneration projects concerned.

7.2. Recommendations for the Victims' Commissioner

At the time of writing, groups remain frustrated by the lack of a Commissioner and the lack of consultation with the sector as to the appointment. On appointment, the Commissioner should prioritise the following:

- 7.2.1 Determine the use of language that will be appropriate for use in Government departmental communications and in shared working between groups from diverse backgrounds.
- 7.2.2 Set standards and protocols for shared working in the Sector.
- 7.2.3 Develop a code of conduct for projects that require shared working between community groups from diverse backgrounds, and between community-based and statutory organisations.
- 7.2.4 Establish an all-party working group on victim/survivor issues.
- 7.2.5 Establish an inter-departmental working group and network of partnership organisations outside the Victims' Forum with a view to developing Action Plans for engaging with the Sector. Other organisations which could be represented in such a network include (though not exclusively) the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission, the PSNI, and the NIO.
- 7.2.6 Acknowledge good practice within the Sector and disseminate this via electronic and other media where appropriate.
- 7.2.7 Collect oral histories, narratives and reminiscences of the Sector, drawing them together in a way that reflects a parity of esteem for experiences across the Sector.

7.3. Recommendations for Community-Based Sectoral Groups

We recognise that some groups struggle with the concept of shared working and encourage community-based organisations engaged in advocacy and in the delivery of a range of professional and other support services to consider the following:

- 7.3.1 Those groups that are well resourced and that have a strong influence or 'voice' in the Sector should take steps to reach out to and develop partnerships both across and within communities, with groups that are less well resourced and whose voices are not as easily heard.
- 7.3.2 Groups should be bold and consistent about drawing attention to their needs and core issues in a public way. They should seek out and identify groups for partnership working, both within and across communities, who have similar concerns and with whom they could co-ordinate advocacy and practice-based work.
- 7.3.3 Groups should take responsibility for building capacity within their membership by engaging constructively with people from other communities in cross-community settings. For example, supported space should be created within groups to discuss problematic and emotive concepts and terms such as 'reconciliation', 'truth' and 'justice'.
- 7.3.4 Groups should develop programmes of activity that aim to demonstrate shared working within the Sector, or that demonstrate an intention to ultimately move their constituency towards shared working.
- 7.3.5 Groups should acknowledge the reality and implications of organisational burnout and take additional measures to avoid and/or cope with that situation by developing

partnership working.

- 7.3.6 Those organising storytelling and oral history projects should be cognisant of the potential for embedding social memories and of the trans-generational impact of the way in which stories related to the Conflict and its legacy are told, recorded and disseminated. Groups should undertake to evaluate the challenges facing those engaged in shared working in storytelling and the recording of oral histories.
- 7.3.7 Groups should take a leadership role in their communities regarding commemoration and memorialisation. They should become actively involved in the processes of consultation around and installation of memorials and work to develop a culture of respect for other groups' commemorative spaces.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: GROUPS CONSULTED

GROUPS INTERVIEWED IN PERSON:

Barnardo's (Belfast)
CALMS (Derry/Londonderry)
Coiste na n-Iarchimí (Belfast)
Colin Community Counselling Project (Poleglass)
Combat Stress (Belfast)
Conflict Trauma Resource Centre (CTRC) (Belfast)
Corrymeela (Ballycastle)
The Cross Group (Belfast)
Cúnamh (Derry/Londonderry)
Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR) (Markethill)
Lenadoon Community Counselling Project (Belfast)
Lifeways Counselling and Psychotherapy (Derry/Londonderry)
Little Paris Group (Enniskillen)
Omagh Support and Self Help Group (Omagh)
Pat Finucane Centre (Derry/Londonderry)
Relatives For Justice (RFJ) (Belfast)
Restorative Action Following the Troubles (RAFT)
RUC George Cross Association - Armagh Branch (Armagh)
RUC George Cross Foundation (Belfast)
South/North Armagh Victims Encouraging Recognition (SAVER/NAVER) (Markethill)
Shankill Stress and Trauma Group (Belfast)
Survivors of Trauma (Belfast)
The Tara Centre (Omagh)
TEAR (Rathfriland)
UDR Association (Lisnaskea/Fivemiletown)
WAVE (Belfast and Omagh)
West Tyrone Voice (Newtownstewart)

GROUPS CONTACTED BY TELEPHONE/EMAIL:

Aisling Centre (Enniskillen)
Contact Youth Counselling Services (Belfast)
East Belfast Mission (Belfast)
Holy Trinity Centre (Belfast)

Nexus Institute (Belfast)
NOVA (Belfast)
Streetbeat Youth Project (Belfast)
The Wider Circle

OTHER INDIVIDUALS/GROUPS CONSULTED/CONTACTED:

Trauma Advisory Panel Coordinators

Sharon Campbell
 Sheena Funston
 Iris Matthews
 Sheelagh Sheerin

Sean Coll

Community Victim Support Officer, Sperrin Lakeland Health & Social Care Trust.

Dr. Yael Danieli

Clinical psychologist and traumatologist in private practice in New York City.

Dr. Kris Brown

Research Fellow, Queen's University Belfast (Institute of Irish Studies) and Healing Through Remembering.

Dr. Dominic Bryan

Director, Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast.

Damian Gorman MBE

Irish playwright and film-maker and the founder of An Crann the Tree.

Arlene Healey

Director: Family Trauma Centre (Belfast)

Dr. Kirk Simpson

Research Fellow, Transitional Justice Institute, University of Ulster.

APPENDIX B: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Victims, definitions

- 1.1 Do the terms victim/survivor ‘work’ for you? Are they appropriate terms, or do you find them problematic in any way?
- 1.2 Can you define what the term ‘victim’ means for you and for your organisation?
- 1.3 Starting out on this piece of research, we have identified **five groups** of victims:
 - 1.3.1 *State agents – incl. PSNI/RUC/Special Constables/Army*
 - 1.3.2 *Victims of violence in inter-loyalist feuds*
 - 1.3.3 *Victims of violence in inter-republican feuds*
 - 1.3.4 *Victims of state violence/state actions*
 - 1.3.5 *Victims of paramilitary/sectarian attacks*

Can you identify with this typology? Are there any victim groups listed here that you feel ought not to be considered as victims? Are there any groups that you think we have left out?
- 1.4 Would you be prepared to work with anyone who perceives him/herself to be a victim?
- 1.5 In her report ‘Support for Victims and Survivors: Addressing the Human Legacy’, Interim Commissioner for Victims and Survivors Bertha McDougall proposed that a Victims Forum be established. Are you willing to sit on that Forum? Why/why not?

2 Your organisation

To help us understand who you are as both an organisation and as individuals in that organisation, we have a short list of questions about the structure and purpose of your group:

- 2.1 How many people make up your organisation? Do you have a formal membership?
- 2.2 What backgrounds do your members come from?
- 2.3 When did your organisation begin?
- 2.4 What was the motivation for forming the group?
- 2.5 How many people work for the organisation – e.g. as facilitators, co-ordinators, administrators?
- 2.6 Do you rely on the help of volunteers for the work that you do as a group?
- 2.7 Are you a single entity, or are you represented in other regions? Perhaps you have partnerships with other groups in other parts of Northern Ireland/the United Kingdom/the Republic of Ireland?
- 2.8 Where does your organisation obtain its core funding from?

3. Terminology and Key Issues

We are aware that there are some key words and key areas of debate relevant to the work of groups like yourselves – words like ‘truth’, ‘justice’, ‘reconciliation’ and ‘memorialisation’ which are often controversial and difficult to talk about. We are keen to know what words and concepts are important to you as a group, and what issues resonate with you.

- 3.1 What would you say are the key words for your organisation?
- 3.2 Can you describe what these words mean for you?
- 3.3 Do these words represent the ‘live issues’ for your group at the moment? Have those issues been at the heart of your group’s work from the outset, or have they developed over time?
- 3.4 Are there words and concepts that come up often in the media/in government in relation to your areas of work that you find problematic? Can you identify some of those words and explain the difficulties you have with them?
- 3.5 What do you understand by ‘remembering’, ‘remembrance’? Are there particular ways in which you as a group ‘remember’ events and people – e.g. *physical material* commemoration in murals, memorial structures, songs, plays, books, films etc, or perhaps more *spiritual intangible* commemoration in prayer gatherings, memorial services?
- 3.6 (In light of the above) And so, would you say that commemoration and memorialisation play an important part in your organisation’s work?
- 3.7 What is the aim of those commemoration processes – why is it important to you to tell those stories about the past and bring them into the present?
- 3.8 What do you understand by the term ‘intergenerational trauma? Does your organisation take into account or perhaps even address the issue of intergenerational trauma?
- 3.9 What are your short term objectives in relation to your organisation and the individuals who belong to it? And what are your long term objectives – where do you see you organisation and its members in say five or ten years’ time?

4. Shared future

As part of this research project for the CRC, we are going to hold a seminar day at the end of the summer. At that seminar, we will be looking at ‘A Shared Future’ (ASF) and specifically at the objectives that it sets out for Victims and Survivors⁷. We want to use that day to work with all the groups like yourselves with whom we are consulting to ask whether you feel that those objectives in ASF are adequate for and relevant to what you perceive to be the work that you do.

- 4.1 Would that sort of discussion mean anything to you?
- 4.2 Would you be willing to participate in that seminar day?
- 4.3 If you have reservations about participating in the seminar day, what can we do to help you to take part in the discussions?

⁷ The main objective set out in ‘A Shared Future’ in relation to Victims and Survivors reads as follows: ‘[to] ensure voice is given to the diverse victims of violence in Northern Ireland, including via archives and victim-centred reconciliation events’ (p. 11).

APPENDIX C: GROUPS REPRESENTED AT THE SEMINAR DAY (as per confirmations of attendance prior to the event)

Barnardo's
Coiste na n-Iarchimí
Colin Community Counselling Project
Combat Stress
The Cross Group
Conflict Trauma Resource Centre
Family Trauma Centre
Holy Trinity Centre
Lenadoon Counselling Project
Little Paris Group
Nexus Institute
N.I. Music Therapy Trust
NOVA
Omagh Support and Self Help Group
Pat Finucane Centre
Restorative Action Following the Troubles (RAFT)
RUC George Cross Foundation
RUC (GC) Association – Armagh
RUC (GC) Association – Banbridge
SAVER/NAVER
Shankill Stress and Trauma
Survivors of Trauma
Trauma Advisory Panel (all Boards)
Tara Centre
TEAR
UDR Association
WAVE
West Tyrone Voice
The Wider Circle

APPENDIX D: SEMINAR WORKSHOPS

Workshop One

Defining Victimhood – Trans-generational Issues.

Realities and Perceptions

Chris is 21 and hasn't had a good week.

Nothing seems to be going right. Two mates went away to England this week.

They'd had enough too.

Noone's quite sure why Chris is so down.

"It just seems to be something that's affecting young people these days" says his Granny.

"Some people say they've got too much.

Some people say they've got too little."

What is certain is that in Chris's area there have been six suicides in six months and there are six murals, two memorials, sixteen flags and no playgrounds.

Too many empty broken bottles to count and not enough full wallets.

Chris's Granny thinks that young people now are luckier than they were when she was growing up. "They're not frightened to go out like we were" – she says.

Chris doesn't agree with her. But Chris says nothing and just listens to her stories. You see she really knew trouble. She saw it all. She saw people killed. She knew people who were imprisoned. She lost her brother when Chris wasn't even born. It was a heart attack that took him. She's told Chris about all of them, even the ones whose names she mixes up. It's important for her to remember and to make sure that Chris knows how the community suffered.

So how can Chris talk to her about fears today?

Chris doesn't understand violence, how people can want to hurt one another and Chris doesn't want to think about it.

Chris doesn't know if Chris is victim or not. Chris doesn't care for labels.

Chris's arms are full of cuts, and Chris's top drawer is full of drugs.

1. What is the impact of the Conflict on Chris?
2. Is Chris a victim of the Conflict? Why?/Why not?
3. What are the implications for Chris being categorised as a Victim?
4. What are the implications for Chris not being categorised as a Victim?

Workshop Two: Commemoration

Imagine you get up one morning and newspapers are bearing the headline: ‘A Memorial to the Troubles’. The story behind the headlines details an official plan to design a monument that is to be a memorial to ‘all who have lost their lives as a result of the conflict’. It is being described as ‘a monument that will be a tangible sign of the successful peace process’ that will ‘acknowledge that suffering and loss have occurred on all sides’. The article notes that ‘the names of all the people who died as a result of the conflict will be inscribed on the monument’.

- 1. How would you feel, reading this article?**
- 2. Is this what you would imagine commemoration in ‘a shared future’ to look like?**
- 3. Can you suggest some of the barriers which might prevent people from all sides of the conflict participating in a project like this?**

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