The
Legacy
of
Conflict

A COMMUNITY BASED SURVEY
IN NORTH AND WEST BELFAST

Proposal for Community Resource Centre

Introduction

In October 1998, Kairos, a voluntary organisation committed to encouraging and empowering community groups to work together, decided to carry out research into community groups providing a counselling, befriending or support service to the community. Particular emphasis was to be placed on groups addressing the trauma of the conflict.

Accordingly Kairos approached Epic, an ex-prisoners' self-help project, to undertake the work on a consultancy basis in Unionist North & West Belfast, and asked another community consultant to carry out the research in Nationalist West Belfast. The two consultants worked closely together.

- A 1990 study of relative deprivation in Northern Ireland showed Belfast ranking second among 26 districts, with regard to the degree and extent of deprivation. At ward level, the city was shown to have the most intense levels of deprivation. The five wards with the worst levels of deprivation in Northern Ireland were found to be located in North and West Belfast, while the next five were mainly in East Belfast. (Stringer et al 1990)

- Fay, Smyth and Morrisey, 1997, examined the troubles related deaths in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1994 and found that just over a third who had died lived in five postal districts, all located in North and West Belfast. When the number of civilian deaths was examined, "it became clear that wards with high deprivation scores predominate amongst those with the largest number of deaths".

- The Centre for Policy Research reports that many of the interface area communities suffer severe levels of multiple disadvantage, ongoing violence and intimidation.

- There are also problems with restricted access to facilities and services which are often located within the "other community". (Belfast Interface Project 1997)

- Concern regarding the needs of children and young people who may be vulnerable to sectarian violence, intimidation and harassment is prevalent. (Belfast Healthy Cities Project 1988)

- Unemployment is very high and there are also concerns regarding health issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, asthma (especially in children), anxiety, depression, domestic violence, bitterness and grief. (Belfast Healthy Cities Project 1988)

- The quality of housing is increasingly linked to health and this is reflected in a number of reports from the public, voluntary and community sectors. (Belfast Healthy Cities Project 1988)

Chosen Areas

It was with this profile in mind that the specific areas were chosen, to carry out the research regarding the impact of the conflict on the community and to give the groups working on the ground the opportunity to highlight the needs being expressed by their communities.

It is accepted that such a resource would need to be inclusive in terms of being multi-agency in both usage and management.

The funding and sustainability would need to be carefully considered and not viewed as a threat to existing organisations.

A steering group across agencies would be an acceptable start to carrying forward the idea, with an advisory group to liaise locally with representatives appointed by the community.

Recommendations for the Future

Proceed with the establishment of a trauma resource centre.

Establish steering group and identify 3 representatives from each of the 2 communities covered in this survey.

Establish community structure to liaise with these representatives and maintain sense of community ownership.

Retain services of community consultants in order to liaise closely with community groups and individuals and to minimise risk of undermining or withdrawal which may come as a result of the vulnerability, misunderstanding, and rivalries that do exist. It is anticipated that there will be a need for a "firefighter" role to handle the setbacks that will inevitably arise during the infancy of the proposed resource centre.

There is a strong body of goodwill and encouragement for such a resource centre. With continued careful and genuine consultation, it would appear from the consultants' findings that both communities are prepared to work for the establishment of such a resource centre.

Methodology

The areas chosen to carry out the research were selected because of the acute problems referred to in the introduction. It was felt that these areas would best reflect the tragic impact of 30 years of conflict upon these communities and the dire needs that exist.

It was hoped that this research would also provide an opportunity for those groups working in the community to put forward their ideas, and have their concerns, if any, voiced. For this reason the methodology employed allowed for genuine consultation as well as straightforward information gathering.

It was the intention to target groups/organisations that were providing a counselling service to their community. However, it soon became clear that few groups were actually providing a specific counselling service, therefore groups were included that provided a befriending and support service as part of their remit.

A combination of methods was employed to enable the community to express its needs, and the two consultants used similar methodologies, but these differed in detail.

- ## Interviews

   Initial contact was made with a number of groups/organisations and individuals by sending out letters or through phone calls or individual personal contacts.

   In one area ten groups/organisations were interviewed. The groups were chosen to reflect work throughout the community, and included ex-prisoners groups, youth groups, women's groups, men's health care and statutory provision.

   In the other area 40 people were interviewed drawn from existing community organisations, statutory agencies and the pool of people with local knowledge. There was a range of people interviewed across gender and across generations. Some were interviewed as individuals, some as parts of groups or organisations.

   The interviews were quite informal and therefore relaxed and friendly. It was very important from the outset to assure the interviewees that they would talk only about issues they felt comfortable with. The content of most of the interviews focused upon the work being done by the respective groups and the personal experiences of the people involved in that work.

- ## Questionnaire
   (see appendix)

   An agreed questionnaire was then drawn up, to be used by both consultants.

   In the Unionist North & West Belfast area, 16 were distributed and 12 were completed and returned.

   In Nationalist West Belfast, 45 were distributed and 38 were completed and returned.

   The reason for the smaller number in Unionist North & West Belfast is that most of the questionnaires were given to groups and completed by a number of people together,

whereas in Nationalist West Belfast many questionnaires were completed by individuals.

The questionnaires were delivered by hand and a full explanation given as to their completion. Some groups chose to complete it in consultation with the researcher, others chose to complete it themselves.

• **Open day/consultation**

A consultation day was held in April in Unionist North & West Belfast at the Argyle Business Centre. A total of 14 groups were invited to the consultation, 10 groups were present on the day and the remaining 4 sent their apologies, expressing their continued interest.

The consultation was facilitated by Martin Snoddon from EPIC, Martie Rafferty from Kairos and Alistair Little were in attendance to answer any questions regarding the research.

Martin Snoddon explained the purpose of the meeting. Martie Rafferty presented a brief background to the proposal for a trauma resource centre drawing on her research visit to South Africa and Alistair Little described how the research was conducted, and some of the findings and difficulties which were encountered. A full discussion followed.

In Nationalist West Belfast three consultation days were held, following a similar pattern to that described above. These were facilitated by Tony Catney from a self-help ex-prisoners group. Martie Rafferty and Shelagh Livingstone were in attendance at the first of these. The days generated animated discussion and gave the opportunity to clarify issues.

Limitations/difficulties experienced in consultation process

• **Sense of threat in community**

In some cases people were very negative regarding the proposal for a resource centre feeling their group would be under threat from such a proposal being realised.

People expressed concern regarding funding in relation to a resource centre. They felt that providing another resource would be a waste of money and take much needed funds away from groups doing the work.

Fears were expressed that other groups might have a hidden agendas.

All these fears had to be addressed and people convinced that the project did not in any way undermine their position, rather it was an opportunity to complement their work.

- **Size of sample**

  The sheer size of the target area made it difficult to consult a truly representative cross-section of the communities.

- **Time constraints**

  The time scale for the consultation was reduced from 3 years to 1 year.

  Difficulties were encountered regarding the return of some questionnaires and much time was spent making phone calls and personal visits in relation to this.

  Neither all of the areas of, nor those affected by, trauma within Nationalist West Belfast are covered by established groups, and a portion of the work had to be carried out on a one-to-one basis with individuals, which was time consuming.

- **Group apprehensions**

  Initially some groups were wary of supplying information concerning their group, and were suspicious as to the motivation of the research.

  There were also questions in relation to the purpose of the research and what would be done with the research on completion. The purpose was explained in detail, as well as introducing the proposal for a community resource that would assist those groups that provide counselling, befriending and support to the community.

- **Local rivalry**

  Many of the people interviewed were unwilling to speak on the record regarding internal problems or difficulties with other groups.

  Some people expressed concern regarding who would have access to the interviews, and requested that their name did not appear on any report. Clearly, they did not feel free to talk openly for fear of their own position within their organisation.

  There were occasions during the interviews when people made the distinction between their personal opinion and the view of their organisation. Personal and organisational rivalry seemed to inhibit open and frank discussion at times.

- **Emotional impact**

  The two interviewers did not have the back-up resources to deal with the human suffering which was stirred up by the questions and issues which the interviews contained. The amount of personal time and emotional energy expended in dealing with this fact had not been anticipated.

Detailed Responses to Interviews, Questionnaires and Consultation Days

Responses to Interviews

- Communities already recognised that there was a great deal of trauma (although few groups used the term trauma) within their community.

- For over twenty-five years communities have been dealing as best they can with that trauma, including offering informal counselling, befriending and support.

- The lack of childcare facilities in the community was highlighted. It was felt that many parents found themselves unable to benefit from services in the community because of this.

- In Unionist North & West Belfast all the people interviewed agreed that the need for community based counselling was essential. However, there was some concern expressed regarding the quality of such a service.

- Some people expressed the need for a closer working relationship with other community groups regarding counselling and the misconceptions that exist.

- There was concern expressed by a number of interviewees regarding the increase in people requesting either formal or informal counselling since the calling of the cease-fires. It was thought that this was especially true of women who for the first time in 30 years of conflict had the opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences which had to a large extent been overlooked.

- Many people are put off by the words "counselling" and "trauma", some people expressed a fear of being stigmatised by the community, family and friends. This seemed to be the case for men more than for women.

- People thought more could be done to create a deeper awareness in relation to counselling, what it involved and what the long term benefits could be to the individual, family and the community.

- It was acknowledged by most of those interviewed that a resource such as that being proposed could go a long way in addressing many of the concerns that community groups have in relation to counselling. There was also keen interest in the resource centre providing training and much needed support to community groups regarding counselling and research.

- Some of the interviewees expressed a degree of difficulty about networking with other groups.

- There was considerable agreement among groups regarding their relationship with Social Services; most felt that their relationship had been a difficult one. However, it was felt by some in Unionist North & West Belfast that this had improved of late but that there was still much work to do to remove the fear and suspicion that many people held towards Social Services.

- Some people within Social Services have been proactive in trying to establish better relationships with community groups, and also within the Social Services themselves in relation to how they are viewed by the community.

Responses to questionnaires

(These are reported on separately for the two areas in order to reflect the detailed responses accurately)

A – Unionist North & West Belfast

• All those surveyed responded that the political conflict impacted directly on their work, either by way of their client base or operational strategy.

• Regarding the psychological, emotional and physical consequences of the political conflict, those surveyed described the conflict as being traumatic, very traumatic or extremely traumatic, not only in relation to their respective communities and work but as individuals who had in many cases been deeply affected.

• Many of the respondents referred to the gender and age differences of their clientele and the difficulties that this often created regarding relationships and understanding. Many saw the benefits and difficulties of their work and personal experiences as intergenerational.

• In relation to the most beneficial support 60% of respondents indicated that a combination of internal/external support was the most beneficial to their group, recognising the value of working in partnership. Of the 40% who indicated external support as being the most beneficial, funding was the main reason for this.

• In response to additional support that would benefit those surveyed regarding their work, 70% indicated that support from statutory agencies and community groups would directly benefit their work in terms of training, sharing of expertise, referral and sustainability.

• Of the remaining 30%, 20% indicated that their work would benefit from additional support from statutory agencies and 10% indicated their work would benefit from additional support from community groups.

Responses to questionnaires

B – Nationalist West Belfast

Section 1 – Contact questions

- All of those surveyed expressed the need for sensitivity and confidentiality in this area of work. 10% expressed the desire for their identities to remain anonymous.

- 100% expressed the desire for future contact.

Section 2 – Present work

- 60% of those surveyed described themselves as self-help groups working within the community. 40% made it clear that they were expressing individual perspectives.

- All of those surveyed expressed a willingness to network with others.

Section 3 – Effects of conflict

- All of those surveyed expressed the view that 30 years of conflict had had an effect on them and their work or experience.

- All community groups i.e. 25% of those surveyed, expressed most concern around young people, especially young males.

- 60% expressed the need for additional resources to deal with effects of conflict.

Section 4 – Methods adopted

- Community groups and organisations adopted the group support approach to their work (80% of survey) while individuals tended to receive support from family and close friends (20% of survey).

- All of those surveyed expressed the need for greater resources both practical and theoretical.

Section 5 – Present needs

- 60% gave the opinion that their needs were best met by self-help within their groups, however, they also saw the advantage in networking with other groups.

- All those surveyed expressed the view that in the area of work around trauma, practical needs were observed i.e. the stability provided by employment and adequate housing.

- 80% expressed the view that they worked with and within marginalised sections of society.

Section 6 – Assessment of needs.

Responses to numbered questions.

1 30% felt that their group was the best conduit for delivering services.

2 20% felt outside help was needed.

3 90% believed in a combination of 1 & 2.

4 80% agreed to share experience.

5 100% agreed to receive experience.

6 95% agreed with partnership.

7 Responses to this question were varied. However, group and or community ownership was a common theme, utilisation of existing structures also featured in 30% of the responses.

8 Responses here were also varied with groups and organisations expressing concerns about external and/or statutory bodies which were seen as state sponsored (80%). Individuals viewed organisations and some community groups as threatening (20%).

Responses to Consultation Days

- Concern was expressed about possible hidden agendas within groups or for individual personalities.

- The issue of duplication of work was raised – for example, are North & West Trust Area Board doing the same thing?

- Concern about the number and range of agencies consulted i.e. how inclusive has the consultation been?

- Concern was expressed regarding the location of the proposed resource centre, and whether it would be easily accessible to all.

- Interest and enthusiasm for research potential, especially in relation to the proposed university at the Peace Wall and the Community Resource Centre.

- Potential area for growth and partnership.

- Wariness of groups with reference to funding vulnerability.

- Would the proposed centre help groups access funding, complete applications etc? This would be of tremendous benefit to community groups working with few staff who spend valuable time struggling with funding forms, monitoring forms and such like.

- Question of sustainability. How to maintain it for 3-5 years and beyond.

- Are there 'strings attached' to funding?

- Proposed management structures for running the centre.

- Will the centre be open to all groups, including those who address implications of the conflict – as well as those addressing the direct consequences?

- How to effect widespread ownership and at the same time establish a workable management structure and steering group to carry the idea forward.

- Possible idea of representatives on steering group being supported and informed by a community 'advisory' group.

- Bringing people together in this way enabled them to see the larger picture and begin to drop their own individual interests in favour of the greater good.

- The consultation days were valuable in helping the communities to become more focused on some of the trauma related issues and possible ways of addressing them.

Questionnaire

Section one – Contact Questions.

e.g. name, address, name of group

Section two – Present Work

2.1   What type of work are you or your group involved in at present?
2.2   What type of client group/user do you work with?
2.3   What is the structure of your group?
2.4   Is the group affiliated to any other groups?
2.5   Is the group a self-help group?
2.6   How long has the group been established?

Section three – Effects of conflict

3.1   How has your work been influenced by the political conflict of the last 30 years?
3.2   Has this made your work more/less difficult?
3.3   Can you describe this influence on your work/client group/family/yourself?
3.4   Has this been across generations or are there generational or age differences?
3.5   Has the influence been different in respect to gender/class/income/age/other?
3.6   How have you been supported in your work and what if any resources can you turn to for support?
3.7   How would your work be different if there had been no political conflict?
3.8   Would you describe the impact of thirty years of political conflict as traumatic?
3.9   Is there a specific event or type of activity or series of events which underlines the impact of the last thirty years?
3.10   Comment in your own words how you feel the conflict of the last thirty years has impacted on you, your work, your group, your community, your family.
3.11   How could the effects of your work be improved?

Section four – methods adopted

4.1 Has your group/work or you as an individual been supported by external agencies?
4.2 If so, what agencies?
4.3 What form of support
      - financial?
      - expertise?
      - professional?
      - training?
      - other?
4.4 Has your group been supported informally?
4.5 If so, how?
4.6 Which, if any, of the above have you found the most beneficial?
4.7 What was the quality of the support and did you find it useful?
4.8 How would your work have been different in the absence of the above support?
4.9 Which additional type of support would you find most beneficial to your work, your group and your community?
4.10 Have you any additional comments on how individuals and/or groups in your community have dealt with the effects of thirty years of political conflict?

Section five – Present needs

5.1 Does your work/group have specific needs in relation to dealing with the effects of thirty years of political conflict?
5.2 Can you detail those needs?
5.3 Who can best fulfil those needs?
5.4 Are those needs best fulfilled by a single agency, or by a combination of agencies?
5.5 Are there different needs within your group, community or a set of common needs or both?
5.6 Are there differences defined by
      - gender?
      - age?
      - income?
      - area?
      - experience?
      - other?
5.7 If so, describe.
5.8 Are there specific and/or marginalised sections within your group, for instance:-
      Former prisoners?
      Children?
      Youths?
      "Victims"?
      Long term unemployed?
      Others?
5.9 Given a blank cheque and unlimited resources what type of services dealing with the effects of the last thirty years would you like to provide?

Section six – Assessment of needs

6.1   Can the services you would wish to provide best be provided by you/your group alone?

6.2   Can the services you would wish to provide best be provided by others outside of your group?

6.3   Can the services you would wish to provide best be provided by a combination of one and two above?

6.4   Would you be prepared to share your expertise gained over the last thirty years with other groups and/or individuals?

6.5   Would you be prepared to receive the expertise gained by others over the last thirty years within a partnership?

6.6   Would you be prepared to collectively utilise the expertise gained over the last thirty years within a partnership?

6.7   In your opinion how best could such a partnership be facilitated to ensure collective ownership of the experience while maintaining individual group autonomy?

6.8   Are there any groups and/or individuals whom you would not wish to work along with?