



# **Omagh Support & Self-Help Group**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2004 – 2005**

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# Background

## Beginnings:

Omagh Support & Self Help Group (OSSHG) was founded in the aftermath of the Omagh Bomb in 1998 to act as a source of support and solace for those adversely affected by the Bomb.

The Self Help & Support Group is a victims group, made up of victims from all denominations and walks of life. Whilst the group primarily operates within the area of Omagh District, it retains close alliances with victims of the bomb located in Buncrana and Spain, as well as a wider network of victims throughout Ireland

## Mission Statement:

“Our mission is to promote, advocate, and address where possible, the needs of victims of the conflict in Ireland in order to achieve health, peace of mind, security and the foundations for personal growth. We are committed to addressing the real and practical needs of those bereaved and injured as a result of terrorist activity, and ensuring that victims are afforded the respect and consideration they deserve”.

## Objectives:

- Relief of poverty, sickness, disability of victims
- Advancement of education and protection
- Raising awareness of needs and experiences of victims, and the effects of terrorism
- Welfare rights advice and information
- Improving conditions of life for victims

The above objectives are reflected in the work of Omagh Support and Self Help Group through our core activities:

- Advice, Advocacy and support
- Assistance with form filling
- I.T. Training courses
- Team Building Events
- Complimentary Therapies
- Monthly Social Activities
- Archive of historical material
- Lobbying
- Youth Work
- Carers Advice and Information

## **Omagh Support and Self Help Group Annual General Meeting**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2005, at 7.00pm, The Village Inn, Omagh**

- 1.0 Welcome by the Chair
- 2.0 Apologies
- 3.0 Chairman's Report
- 4.0 Project Co-ordinator's Report
- 5.0 Treasurer's presentation and adoption of accounts
- 6.0 Appointment of Accountant
- 7.0 Adoption of Amendments to Constitution
- 8.0 Election of Honorary Officers and Committee Members

# Chairman's Report

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Dear members and friends,

It has been 15 months since our last AGM on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2004 which was held at the mobile office. The Group has since evolved and grown in a number of different avenues. I will outline a number of the important events that have happened over that period.

In January 2004 the Omagh film was being produced. The film has gone on to being a great success around the world winning many awards, but more importantly telling our story and leaving a lasting impression wherever it is seen.

We also were successful in securing the removal of the 32 county sovereignty movements website. This was the second time we had to do this.

In terms of our development we have created a three-year plan for the group helped by QE5 Consultants.

We met with a significant number of Political and Religious leaders during this year. We travelled to Dublin to meet Irish Taoisigh Bertie Ahern, Edna Kenny and Gardai Commissioner Noel Conroy. We also met with Brice Dickson of the Northern Ireland Humans rights commission and presented a file to support our call for a full cross border public inquiry. In addition we met with the Irish Human Rights Commissioner Morris Manning to discuss our case.

We also held meetings with Secretary of State Paul Murphy, Leaders of Political Parties, David Trimble, Nigel Dodds, Jeffrey Donaldson and Mark Durkin.

We met with Religious leaders, Archbishop Robin Eames, Archbishop Sean Brady, Presbyterian moderator Ken Newell and the Methodist president Reverent Brian Fletcher.

Also in the month of April the civil action had its first appearance in court.

On June 4<sup>th</sup> we met with Sharon Watters our Co-ordinator for the first time. During the month of July we held a Management Committee training weekend in Kesh, Co. Fermanagh. In August we organised a very effective memorial service to mark the sixth anniversary of the Omagh Bomb.

During the month of August the group went through a very turbulent time. We held an EGM in early September and elected a 12-member management committee. This was a positive step forward for the Group and gave us a more focused and structured dynamic.

2005 commenced by our taking part in a hugely successful street collection organised by the voluntary groups and Omagh District Council for the tsunami victims. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of January we attended John Whites trial in Letterkenny in which he was acquitted.

During February I and Marion Radford were interviewed by a French based TV crew for a film to remember victims of terrorism of Europe. The film was screened on the

11<sup>th</sup> March - the 1<sup>st</sup> European day of remembrance for victims of terrorism. In memoriam of this special day we held a service in the Omagh Memorial garden which representatives from both governments attended. We also unveiled a dedicated plaque to mark the occasion.

We also have completed many successful projects during this year which Sharon will explore in detail.

Other activities include liaising with Kevin O’Gara and Catherine Adams to discuss the new Omagh Environmental Improvement street plan and in particular the marking of the bomb site. We also met with Brian Hughes; Pat Doherty and Gabriel Shields from Omagh County Hall regarding acquiring land to enlarge the present memorial garden.

The group has also been very active in pursuing justice related issues during the past year. We met with the opposition spokesman in Northern Ireland in the House of Commons. We had a number of meetings with the police both in Omagh and Belfast. We had questions raised in the House of Commons by Conservation MP Laurence Robinson, in relation to DNA and Paddy Dickson. We are also actively applying pressure on the government to help create a suitable permanent memorial garden and have the street marked where the bomb exploded and we are continuing to follow the progress of the two men in custody in connection with the bomb in Northern Ireland.

We have attended a number of conferences and meetings to make sure the group continues to uphold its high profile and is kept informed about any developments in the victims sector.

The largest ongoing project the group is involved in is the Archiving project. This will be the first of its kind in the country and will be a fantastic source of information and reference not just to ourselves but to everyone in the world when it goes on the Internet. A working group of dedicated people are involved in this and it will be a great achievement when finished.

We have also just recently formed a justice sub group. This appears to have got off to a shaky start through lack of interest. I do however hope it will work well because this is one of the fundamental reasons for the formation of the group. I would encourage people to support this.

All and all this organisation has worked very hard to do the work I have described. It would take a book to describe all that we have done in the past 15 months including 100s of interviews. This is my 7<sup>th</sup> year as chairman as I write this I find myself struggling for words to say what I am feeling. It has been a time of change in my life. I have my own emotions to deal with and those of many others around me. My time as chairman had been filled with passion, pain and at times frustration but mostly I have been humbled by many of you who have despite our differences shown your trust and support for me.

It is that support that makes the OSSHG a successful organisation.

For me it has been a privilege and an experience that will live with me for a long time. My decision to take a less active roll has primarily been due to my enrolment with other victim’s organisations around the world and on my own family and our need to be together more.

Over many months of reflection I have realised how lucky I am to have my family, small as it may be and now it is time to give to them again.

I sincerely hope that this AGM will be an exciting opportunity for change to see the OSSHG continue to advance to allow for creativity and a new energy to grow; we now have proper offices with proper facilities, and a dedicated, hard working Co-ordinator in charge that it is a privilege to work with.

There are many members who I have worked with and even cried with. You have enriched my life and I hope that I have offered something to yours like you have to mine. I will continue to be very active in the area of justice and work with the members of the group. Words cannot express the journey we have shared over the past 7 yrs. We work in an environment that is often difficult and ignorance and arrogance can be a problem. It was a journey that I have no regrets about I wish nothing but the best for you individually and the worthy and dedicated organisation that the Omagh Support and Self Help Group is.

**Michael Gallagher**  
***Chairman***

# Project Co-ordinator's Report

I would like to welcome everyone here tonight to the Annual General Meeting of Omagh Support and Self Help Group. I am very pleased to be here in my capacity as Project Co-ordinator and am delighted to be afforded the opportunity to highlight the many key successes of the Support and Self Help Group over the past year.

I commenced my employment with the Support Group in June of last year; this was at an opportune time when great development and visioning was taking place - the creation of the 3 year Strategic Plan, the Needs Analysis and Management Training to name but a few.

The formation of each of these and the training received formed the necessary structure for the successes which followed throughout the year.

## Youth Programme

In June of last year 15 young people aged between 12-18 along with 3 Group Leaders spent a weekend in Belcoo Activity Centre where they enjoyed a range of outdoor pursuit activities. The weekend was extremely successful in terms of bringing together a group of young people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to mix and interact with one another. As a result the Summer Programme has been extended to include a trip to Camelot Theme Park in Manchester this July. It is anticipated that a further range of personal development and awareness training and social outings will be determined along with the creation of a Youth Sub-Group in the forthcoming months.

## Art Exhibition

During the month of November we hosted a very successful Art Exhibition entitled "The Summer of '98" in the Tourist Information Centre. The exhibition depicted an artist's portrayal of the tragic events of that summer. The exhibition was privately launched and then opened to the public for a period of two weeks. The exhibition attracted many visitors with some as far a field as America offering their support.



## Complimentary Therapies

The month of December seen the commencement of our 10 week taster complimentary therapy programme. Although slow to start, success of the therapy programme grew from strength to strength with 32 members availing of the treatment.

The programme provided a whole host of beneficial treatments to members in relation to alleviation of many physical ailments and stress related symptoms. Treatments ranged from reflexology, bower technique massage, and Indian head massage. Following this taster programme reiki therapy is currently available to all members in the Group's office and further funding has been requested to offer an extensive range of treatments.



## Monthly Social Events

One of the most successful components of Omagh Support and Self Help Group has been the establishment of monthly social activities for all members. The premise of the monthly get togethers was to provide all members with an opportunity to catch up, to share what is happening within the group, and to provide new ideas for group direction.

During the month of November members enjoyed listening to tales of Old Omagh from Dr Haldene Mitchell, in December a Christmas Shopping trip and Peace concert was provided with a family orientated pantomime in January. In February we hosted a very successful gardening and horticulture information evening, with a flower arranging and fishing trip being the order of the day in March.

Due to the success of the monthly activities a new programme is due to commence in August.

## Archive Project

The month of November seen the commencement of our hugely successful Archive Project. The primary objective of the project was to create an easily accessible online library of material comprising of newspaper articles, television reports, letters, e-mails, and other media forms relating to the Omagh Bomb and other global terrorist related atrocities. This project is extremely important in terms of the beneficial training and skills which members can acquire. It is also an innovative project in that although many paper forms of documentation exist in relation to the Bomb there is currently no such on-line source. Therefore our project is vitally important in terms of reaching out and being accessible to people all over the globe.

Through the implementation of our Archive Project a 9 member Sub-Group has been created who have successfully undergone Project Planning and Management Training in order to effectively oversee the project.

13 people have participated in CLAIT computer training  
7 people have participated in ECDL computer training  
14 have participated in Internet and E-mail training  
23 have participated in scanning and preparation of materials training  
14 have participated in Archive Team Building events

We have had 3 placement students from local Secondary schools offering their services to benefit the project and just recently we have been fortunate enough to secure a 6 month placement student from Enterprise Ulster. Jonathan Crozier commenced his placement with us in May and is proving to be a vital asset to the archive project.



## Memorial Services

During the year the Group have successfully hosted a number of memorial services in remembrance of victims of terrorism. During the month of March ('04) a short inter-dominational service was hosted as a source of support to the victims of the train bomb in Madrid.

In August the sixth anniversary of the Omagh Bomb was marked with a service of music, reflection and prayer. The service was well attended by officials and members alike and provided a source of comfort to families during a difficult time. We were also privileged to welcome Keka Puchades from Madrid to our service. Keka was the friend of Ricio Abad Ramos, one of the Spanish victims and happened to be visiting Omagh. Keka read a personal prayer at the service which was a fitting tribute.

In March of this year the Group also held a service in recognition of the First European Day in remembrance of Victims of Terrorism'.

### **Guide Book for Victims and Survivors**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> April we launched our practical Guide Book for Victims and Survivors of the Conflict with Mr John Clarke from the Victims Unit attending as our Guest Speaker.

Demand for our Guide Book has proved very popular which reflects the quality of its content and its value in terms of providing a practical source of support and guidance to other victims and their families.



### **Team Building Events**

In addition to our Archive project team building events we also held a 'Fun' Team Building out door pursuit day at Toddsleap Activity Centre. 20 Group members braved the elements and enjoyed a range of activities including Robin Hood style archery, blind land rover driving and clay pigeon shooting. A fun-filled day was thoroughly enjoyed by all and it is anticipated that a similar event will be arranged for later in the year.

### **A-Z Policy and Procedures**

Last month we created our A-Z Policy and Procedures Manual and held a two day training residential covering all aspects of the manual.

The creation of the manual demonstrates the Group's desire to ensure a safe, efficient and effective way of operating that protects the interests of all those involved in the work we do.

The training residential was thoroughly enjoyed by all and afforded members the opportunity to work through each Policy as a Group and ensure collective understanding.



## **WEA (Workers Educational Association) Training**

During the winter months I, Michael and Patsy took part in an accredited 'Managing Better Relations' 12 week Training Programme facilitated by WEA. This training was very beneficial in terms of its relevance to Community Group activity and provided us with a host of knowledge in the relation to maximising group potential. As a result of our participation we received 15 hours tailored training for our members. This training will be highly beneficial to the Group as it affords members the opportunity to work through relevant issues and learn together as a collective group. The training sessions commenced in May and will continue after the summer months.

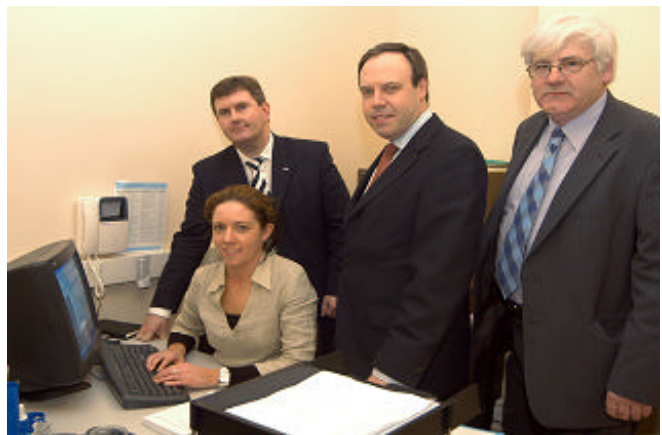
## **Recreational Courses**

This month has seen the commencement of our Programme of Recreational courses with our first course - Flower Arranging proving a popular choice amongst members. The Programme which will incorporate first aid training, card making, Spanish for beginners, calligraphy, digital photography and recreational stone walling and brickwork will run throughout the year.

The recreational and creative nature of the courses will be instrumental in aiding the personal development of Group members. Through participation members will be afforded the opportunity to liaise with each other and learn at their own pace in a comfortable environment.

## **Visitors and Group Meetings**

During the year the Group have been very pro-active in meeting with numerous influential Group leaders and dignitaries. Behind each of these meetings members exert a lot of hard work and preparation, a trait which will hopefully continue well into this year and beyond.



## **The Future of Omagh Support and Self Help Group**

Although this has been Omagh Support and Self Help Group's first year working in a formal capacity I think you will all agree that we have successfully completed a wide range of projects and programmes. The increase in membership and in particular the number of injured families who have come on board demonstrates the inclusiveness and commitment of the Group to actively reaching out to all those affected by our troubled society.

In the forthcoming year in addition to the completion of our Archive Project, the commencement of our extensive complimentary therapy programme and our social activities we are planning a host of new activities. One which we have commenced preparation for is our Carer's Clinic. This will be an advisory and support service to all carer's in the area irrespective of their circumstances. Preparation has also begun in relation to plans to create a be-friending service for all members. Other plans in the pipeline include the hosting of a series of emergency planning workshops and a health M.O.T. day in partnership with 2 other Victims Groups. We also anticipate the creation of our third Sub-Group in the near future. This Sub-Group will concentrate on activities and personal development of our youth membership.

On a final note I would like to thank all Omagh Support and Self Help Group funders without whom our work would not be possible. I would also like to thank the Management Committee and members' for your kind support and encouragement throughout the year.

**Sharon Watters**  
***Project Co-ordinator***

# Appendix II

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