

R.A.F.T. Restorative Action Following on the Troubles

The Need...

Over thirty years of conflict have left *three damaged generations* – people who were children during the Troubles and shared the trauma of their parents, and a generation who were teenagers then and are parents now.

Those living in and around ARMAGH suffered greatly, and continue to do so because of the self-perpetuating cycle of low self-esteem, poor educational achievement and the learned response of violent reaction, prejudice and defensiveness. Armagh with the second highest incidence of deaths during the Troubles also has large pockets of deprivation and high rates of suicide, alcohol and drug abuse.

The Response...

R.A.F.T. aims to *tackle the residue of the trauma of the Troubles* focusing on rehabilitation and emotional recovery, targeting especially the most deprived and vulnerable. The project seeks to equip people with the skills needed to regain their place in society and help to rebuild that same society

The Action...

Participants benefit from *individual counselling, courses and workshops* in the management of stress, trauma, panic, anger and conflict, enabling them to develop confidence and personal/social responsibility within their own community. *The courses* run by R.A.F.T. holistically deal with the tide of problems left in the wake of thirty years of sectarian conflict, which, sadly, often found a focus in marginalized areas of Armagh. These courses are complemented by creative art, music, dance, drama and alternative therapies. The R.A.F.T. Project is UNIQUE in that it offers to those still suffering from the fall-out of their traumatic experiences during the Troubles, *the multifaceted approach* of a one-stop facility, in addition to the *individual attention* offered to users, plus sustained follow-through.

The Organisation...

The R.A.F.T. *management committee* liaises with voluntary and statutory organisations, monitors the programmes, and deals with transport and childcare issues. An *advisory panel* is also in place.

The Outcome...Long-term

Given time, the R.A.F.T. programmes will result in the emergence of a core of people with the skills to further not only their own positive development, but also the ability to awaken a more developed social sense in their peers and society generally- skills particularly beneficial to those currently struggling with depression and the inherited results of deprivation.

The Outcomes..Actual

In the first year of the Project (May '04 - May '05) R.A.F.T.'s Programmes have had a major impact on the lives of the local population.

Participants - Men and Women - have included:

- 10% long-term sufferers of complex trauma who all expressed acute self-destructive behaviour. (Within this group incidents of self-harm have been reduced by 50%)

- 40% had addiction problems (1/3 are now exhibiting a marked improvement)

- 50% had low self-esteem, lack of motivation and no formal educational qualifications (1/4 have now enrolled for Further Education courses with 1 preparing for Higher Education)

In addition several users have developed through our programmes, the confidence and competence to break out of the 'ghetto mentality' and to join relevant activities in the wider community, including representing R.A.F.T. at civic functions.

Cross-Community: The Project recognises the hurts and fractures which exist within our communities and the need for healing. In response to this need, R.A.F.T.'s ethos ensures that services are open to all, and the diversity of Tutors/Counsellors/Therapists/Volunteers and users reflect this ethos

Referrals: Referrals have been made to R.A.F.T. from Social Services, Medical Doctors and Solicitors. This acknowledgement is a vote of confidence in our service which has also seen a 25% rise in crisis referrals.

Meeting Local Need: In February 2005 R.A.F.T. carried out a *Community Audit* in those areas of Armagh recognised by government agencies as the most deprived. The audit reinforced the need for R.A.F.T. to continue with its current service provision and indicated the need to expand and develop. It is vital for R.A.F.T. to obtain FUNDING to sustain current commitments and the increase in demand for our services.

Conclusion...

R.A.F.T. aims to offer healing and hope, with the long-term aim of the emergence of a *critical mass of transformed individuals* acting as leaven within their own clusters of family and community, nurturing the ideal and beginning to fulfil the promise of a *better future for all.*