

SOLAS Victims Support Group

NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT

April 2005 – Version 1

Prepared By:
Mr John Stinson
HRS Consultancy Services

Methodology

SOLAS is a victim support group set up in 2003 to provide a variety of services and activities for bereaved and injured victims of the conflict in Belfast and the Greater Belfast area.

It's aim is to ensure that those most affected by the Troubles have recourse to a non - political and non sectarian organisation which caters specifically for their needs and enables them to deal with their trauma and move on with their lives.

It provides counselling, befriending and advocacy services for innocent victims of various forms of terror, and provides a catalyst for informed discussion and in-depth research into victims' issues in an effort to highlight their needs to policy makers and statutory bodies. The fact that so many victims feel the necessity to form such groups is a sad reflection on the lack of statutory provision to deal with the multiple problems victims' experience – whether social, economic, physical or psychological.

The main function of the group, however, has been to provide a means by which those who had been deeply hurt and isolated could share their experiences with others who had suffered in similar ways and to whom they could more easily relate. It offers a range of help on practical issues, including counselling, advice on welfare rights, employment and education and training.

Membership of the group is growing all the time and there are 80 direct members plus their extended families, which broadens the overall figure to around 300 people. They have

a vital role to play in building a peaceful Northern Ireland.

THE RANGE OF SERVICES OFFERED

- Befriending/Visiting
- Training
- Employment and Education
- Basic Counselling
- Trauma Counselling
- Welfare Rights
- Social Events
- Group Support

Many of the individuals associated with SOLAS perceive themselves to be, directly or indirectly, victims of terrorist violence or to have suffered in other ways from the social and economic deprivation that has resulted as a direct consequence of such action. The group believes that many innocent people who have not been engaged in terrorism or its related criminality have been victims of it.

They have been affected by terrorist violence as a result of the murder of a loved one in their immediate family or in the wider family circle, or through their own or a family member's disability by terrorist violence or through intimidation. They have in turn suffered not only from that traumatic event but also from society's attitude and response to that tragedy.

Many innocent victims of terrorism have also, as a direct result of the loss of a loved one, suffered economically and have experienced severe social isolation. Families have been devastated and family relationships subjected to immense stress; careers have been destroyed and children have grown up without fathers, mothers or siblings. Many victims have, as a result of their experiences, felt the need to withdraw from society and are often wary of making contact with outside agencies. Including government and its agencies, as they feel that their situation makes them vulnerable.

Their community is recognised as an area that has, and indeed is still suffering severe political tensions i.e. including the consequences and fall out of recent paramilitary feuds. The community living within the area has probably experienced some of the most horrific events of the Troubles and is still trying to come to terms with many traumatic outcomes. The group understand that to achieve any long term benefits for their community there must be an emphasis placed on providing services for people still affected by sectarian murders, paramilitary shootings, imprisonment, bombings accompanied by anti-social behaviour and joy

riding.

SOLAS recognises however that the prospects of achieving any sustainable benefits for the community are greatly enhanced, by tackling these issues in a totally non sectarian approach, with at least a degree of cross community engagement.

DEPRIVATION

SOLAS is located in the Ballymacarret ward of East Belfast and deals primarily with the wider community from both Inner and Outer East Belfast. According to the Noble indicators the group have targeted areas that suffer from multiple deprivation. These areas are characterised by poor health, high unemployment, and low educational attainment.

Areas within Greater East Belfast such as Ballymacarret, Ballybeen and Tullycarnet are recognised as areas, which suffer from deprivation in both social and economic terms. The Policy Planning and Research Unit in a report entitled 'Relative Deprivation in Northern Ireland' have identified these areas as deprived. The multiple deprivations in the area are identified using a number of indicators. The area is characterised by:

- There are high levels of unemployment in Inner East Belfast (24%).
- High levels of long term unemployment.
- Low levels of educational attainment.
- High proportion of welfare dependents.
- Higher than average number of lone parent families.
- High age dependence ratio.
- Stigmatization and the adverse publicity.
- High proportion of household with incomes of under £10,000.

In a survey report – Jobseekers Evaluation – December 2000, it was identified that in East Belfast, as at December 1998, there were understood to be about 2,300 unemployed claimants, but this measure was believed to underestimate the total extent of unemployment, because of the unknown number of other people who were also unemployed but unable to claim. Of these about half were long-term unemployed who had been out of work for at least a year. This unemployment was particularly prevalent in Inner East Belfast, which is generally taken to comprise the wards of Ballymacarret, Island, The Mount and Woodstock. Between them these wards had slightly more than half of all the unemployed in East Belfast and a somewhat higher proportion of the long-term unemployed. That is still the case and Ballymacarret, Island and The Mount have been declared 'New TSN' priority areas because of their

significantly high numbers of long-term unemployed.

Young people living in these areas suffer more ill health and poorer mental health, are less likely to benefit from health and social care, have higher numbers of looked after children by Health Trusts, and have lower educational attainment and have higher numbers of non school attainments. Areas such as Ballymacarret, The Mount, Woodstock, Island and Tullycarnet that are located in the 10% most deprived electoral wards according to the Noble Indicators of multiple deprivation, are seen by this group as priority areas that need addressed in relation to health issues.

Leading from Behind: An Agenda for Change in East Belfast (March 2001) Neighbourhood Research Project as part of a Capacity Building Programme in 14 locally defined neighbourhoods:

- 828 households surveyed, contained 2039 individuals, 46.4% males and 53.6% females. 25% were under 16 years old and 18% were 60 and over.
- 46.8% of households had someone with a medical condition being treated by a doctor or hospital.
- 30.3% were receiving benefits related to illness.
- 31.6% felt that drug abuse was a problem locally and 47.9% said alcohol abuse was a problem.
- 19.5% of households had at least one person taking medication for nervous illness, stress and depression.
- Approximately 28% felt their quality of life was getting worse

A number of core issues were identified through the research, in relation to well-being the following were priorities for action:

- Alcohol and substance abuse were among the top three problems articulated by communities across East Belfast
- More support and Counselling Services for Stress and Depression are required
- Relevant, user friendly, health information is needed at neighbourhood level, especially among young men and boys

The group's work aims to address the legacy of the conflict through targeting areas and communities who have traditionally been exposed to specific problems generated by the conflict, and who need to be assisted to return to a peaceful and stable society. There is a focus on problems such as social distance, segregation and alienation, which have prevented people from these New TSN areas in achieving their potential, given the pressures and affects of the conflict. The group aims to realise the economic and employment opportunities which peace brings and shall promote social integration, inclusion and reconciliation.

The areas/communities identified have suffered from social and economic development as a result of the conflict. These are illustrated by demographic and labour market patterns/structures, and low levels of income, skills and qualifications, and consequently display high levels of deprivation.

As a result of the legacy of the conflict the majority of their members come from areas within Outer East Belfast, which are areas of polarisation and of extreme disadvantage with high levels of unemployment, low educational achievement and high levels of DHSS benefit dependency. Opportunities are being sought to bring people out of these areas and allows them to meet people from other communities.

Work is being done to take opportunities arising from peace through encouraging actions which have a stake in peace and which will actively promote a stable and normal society where opportunities can be developed arising primarily on account of the reduction in political unrest. There is a belief that peace has brought about the opportunity for people within our community to develop a new culture.

Traditionally people from these areas would not have considered accessing educational or training opportunities (a point reinforced by the Nobel Report) and therefore effectively exclude themselves from many of the new opportunities for employment due to their skills deficit. The climate is now changing and local people are now eager and willing to enter into the employment market. However, barriers exist as to where they access this training.

Through education and increasing the life skills of people from within these areas/communities they will be more able to engage in a process of reconciliation and mutual understanding. If confidence levels and social inclusion are promoted and realised, then people within this group shall be more able to articulate their view points and put forward their opinions constructively, whilst listening and engaging with other people from within Northern Ireland and between North and South.

STRATEGY

The group has established their strategic direction:

PRINCIPALS AND OBJECTS

1. To bring relief to persons in Belfast and the greater Belfast area who are suffering hardship, sickness or distress as a result of the conflicts in Northern Ireland;

2. To advance the education of the public in Belfast and the greater Belfast area and elsewhere in the effects of the conflict and especially the effects of the conflict on children;
3. To provide support and counselling services in Belfast and the greater Belfast area for victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

AIMS:

1. To help victims/survivors of the conflict rebuild their lives and reintegrate them back into society.
2. Provide help and advice to the innocent victims of the conflict, in order to help them develop as individuals and assure them that they are neither ignored nor forgotten.
3. To listen and understand victims needs, in a safe and support environment and to provide help, advice, support and representation.
4. Improve the quality of life of its members.
5. To improve opportunities for training and employment, especially for those suffering isolation and exclusion.
6. Work to promote the personal development and social re-integration of members who have been socially isolated and marginalised.
7. Accompaniment to Doctors/Hospital/Solicitor/Housing Executive or anywhere the participant may be apprehensive to attend alone.
8. To provide information on benefit entitlements and welfare rights.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To provide a safe environment for victims
2. To provide support services for victims
3. To deliver programmes of activity that will meet the needs of victims
4. To provide representation on behalf of victims.
5. To engage members in activities which will lead to empowerment and self – fulfilment.
6. To develop relationships with similar victims groups and share experiences and exploit networking opportunities.
7. To maximize the potential of participants in their chosen fields, eg. workplace/training.
8. Provide local people with skills, knowledge and opportunities to develop as individuals and become better members of their communities.

AREAS OF SUCCESS

Since the formation of SOLAS in 2003 the group has been successful in offering a supportive service for it's members.

Details of successes to date are as follows:

- Trips to London, Sligo and Dublin for members funded by themselves.
- Cultural and political awareness trips organised and funded through CRC.
- Public awareness project.
- Volunteering amongst members.
- Giving benefit advice.
- Signposting services and career advice.
- Coffee mornings.
- Barbeque for members and friends.
- Day trips to Bangor and Portrush.
- Counselling services.
- Practical support.
- Health and nutrition advice.
- Effective Networking.
- Basic computer awareness skills.
- Shopping trips for lady members.
- Visit to other victims groups to share experiences.
- Northern Ireland Memorial Fund Assistance Grants.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

They hope to obtain further funding to:

- Organise more trips for their members and days away for respite;
- Run more personal development courses;
- Undertake relevant research within their area;
- Develop the centre as a drop in facility;
- Undertake more outreach work;
- Assist carers and their families in providing respite breaks.



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Introduction

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

The stated terms of reference for carrying out the assignment were as follows:

- Formulate a questionnaire;
- Organise focus groups with members and committee;
- Identify the needs of group members and committee;
- Formulate a plan in respect to these needs;
- Produce a draft and final report

RATIONALE

In order to find out what the real needs of members of SOLAS are, and how these might be met, it was imperative to carry out this analysis. This will be a crucial document detailing their real needs, and will serve the group well when designing future services and when approaching funders in the future.

ADDRESSING VICTIMS' NEEDS

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield was commissioned by the Secretary of State to establish a "commission to look at possible ways to recognise the pain and suffering felt by victims of violence". Sir Kenneth launched his commission with a high-powered press conference and proceeded to conduct an extensive and high-powered consultation exercise. Victims were at last

being listened to. Subsequently, victims groups, such as SOLAS, have been established to provide a unique service to victims of paramilitary terrorism in their local area, with the aim of offering care and support to each and every individual member of the group.

For the majority of SOLAS members, grief and trauma have been very private and personal experiences. There was little or no provision of services by professional agencies at the time, or since. The common experience of members is that as individuals they adapted their lifestyles with the raw trauma exposure still integrated within them. As victims they are individuals, and they coped as individuals. For some, collective action is an alien concept.

In addition to the brutal loss of a loved one, the community has experienced serious psychological damage. Such distinct areas of damage are as follows:

1. **Loss of trust** – This affects relationships within the wider community. It has, and will negate offers of help from “outside” agencies, and will depend solely on support from individual family members or the wider family circle;
2. **Disempowerment** – The sense of disempowerment that follows attack by terrorists draws caution to the fact that careful consideration must be given to avoid further disempowerment, when giving victims the opportunity to tell their story.
3. **Lack of support** - The members of SOLAS had experienced very little personal attention and support. It is paramount to recognise the responsibility of putting their “message across” without running the risk of exploiting their own vulnerabilities.

This document will address these needs within the parameters of the stated terms of reference. However, it must be recognised that such needs are not always explicit and easily communicated. Why? Because these people have not been used to seeking help and assistance. As previously stated, they have, through no choice of their own, coped by themselves, and to date such inherent needs have not necessarily been expressed. Their needs are so deep and entrenched, as a result of years of personal suffering and alienation that they themselves do not necessarily know what they want.

Taking these factors into consideration my approach to undertaking both the primary and secondary research for this assignment is outlined in the following research methodology section.



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Methodology

RESEARCH DESIGN

Considerable debate exists over the appropriateness of the various methods and methodological stances for conducting evaluative research. The overall approach of a research design may be classified as qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of the two. There is no such thing as one correct design – designs vary from one study to another.

A qualitative research design is one in which the researcher plans to observe, discover, describe, compare and analyse the characteristic attitudes, themes and underlying dimensions of a particular unit in depth and detail. The fact that collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth and detail of qualitative data, (Moser, 1983).

A quantitative design is concerned with measurement - measuring the magnitude, size or extent of a phenomenon. The quantitative design counts, measures and analyses data statistically.

Quantitative and qualitative research designs may be depicted as polar types of research projects, with research designs that mix both qualitative and quantitative elements filling in between the two poles, (Seaman, 1987).

Campbell and Stanley (1963) are often cited as staunch proponents of qualitative methods and although not primarily concerned with evaluation research, they describe their choice as: “The only way of establishing a cumulative

tradition in which improvements can be introduced without the danger of a faddish discord of old wisdom in favour of inferior novelties”.

For the purposes of this assignment, the researcher has selected qualitative research as being the most suitable method. In the initial stages of the research undertaken, the focus was on secondary data. The review of secondary data involved studying and analysing a range of government and other relevant publications. Having decided on the nature of the research project and its objectives, primary research was carried out in order to collect information specifically related to this assignment.

Following careful consideration of the methods of qualitative research, personal interviewing was selected as being the most appropriate. Thus, the challenge with qualitative analysis is to find a “unit narrative,” which, in turn, is linked to achieving appropriate levels of generality in subsequent analysis. With this in mind, the use of personal interviewing has three major advantages for this assignment:

1. The respondents are allowed “freedom of expression.”
2. Such formats are more likely to allow issues, which are specific to the organisation, to be raised. Some issues might have been missed if a standard data collection method, such as mail-shot, had been adopted.
3. A personal interview provides an opportunity for the respondent to ventilate both their opinions and their feelings. Open questions during the interview are a much more direct means of facilitating this process.

Taken together, these factors empower respondents to express their views, to participate in the future development of the organisation and genuinely influence its ultimate shape.

In defining a model for the research process, the researcher was drawn to the loose concept of “participatory action research” (Whyte, 1991). This is a strategy that allows a flexible approach to a sensitive research field and engages the researched population in the process. In practical terms, it means that membership of SOLAS was active in the management, monitoring, and implementation of all aspects of the research assignment.

SAMPLING

Burns & Grove (1987) state that one of the most frequent questions asked by researchers is “what size of sample should I use”? Unfortunately there are no absolute answers

to this question. There are so many qualifiers that, to some extent, the answer must be specific to the study. The general rule is to make the sample as large as possible. Overall, large samples are better approximations of the target population than small samples. Sampling error decreases as sample size increases. However, practical restraints such as time, money and availability of potential subjects must enter into the decision. Factors that must be considered in making decisions about sample size include the type of study, number of variables, and the data analysis techniques.

Exploratory studies, both qualitative and quantitative and case studies use very small samples. A small sample size may better serve the researchers who are usually interested in examining the situation in depth from various perspectives, (Morgan, 1988).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher recognised that in order to achieve an overall impression of the real needs of the victims of paramilitary terrorism, a representative sample of users ought to be interviewed. The researcher identified this sample by taking 10% of the current membership of SOLAS, which included interviews with existing committee members, and interviews with local community activists and two related service providers within the sector to bring a wider perspective to the study.

This provided the primary data that facilitated the researcher in his work. An attempt was made to strike a balance with respect to gender, geographical location, age, committee/non-committee interviewees, member/non-member interviewees, relatives of victims of the conflict who have been murdered, and those who had been injured.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The semi-structured questionnaire was designed specifically to seek qualitative information from group members (see appendix 1). Its purpose is to ask open questions, which will ascertain the views of members. The responses to such questions will provide in-depth information on the feelings and opinions of members.

The guiding questions used with the members in the interviews were as follows: -

- As a victim of terrorism, how did this affect you and your family?

- What support and assistance was available?
- How did you and your family cope with the situation?
- Did other people outside the family unit help your situation?
- How do you feel victims' issues are being addressed by organisations independent of SOLAS?
- As a victim, what are your current needs?
- How has SOLAS helped you?
- How do you feel you will cope with the future?

With the other organisations interviewed, a semi-structured approach was used in gathering relevant information.

INTERVIEWS

Initial contact was made by telephone to clarify the objectives of the research. Confidentiality was assured and a commitment to proceed with the interview was agreed. Most interviews were carried out at the group's premises at 324a Upper Newtownards Road, Ballyhackamore, Belfast.

The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions to help the respondent understand exactly what was being asked, though still allowing enough openness for relevant information to be obtained. The provision of additional ideas and personal thoughts helped to improve and further enhance the benefit of the research project. Semi-structured questions also kept the interview on a specific and relevant line of questioning, preventing misinterpretation and minimising the chances of abstract and vague answers.

The researcher conducted some interviews with individuals, while others were conducted with couples; these lasted on average forty-five minutes.

The motives and intentions of the research were explained and respondents were assured of complete anonymity. They were also assured that they would be given access to the final transcript of the research.

INTERVIEWER BIAS

In order to maintain the highest possible level of objectivity, the primary questions were asked by the independent consultant. The researcher was aware when interviewing people that nothing is completely predictable, and this is particularly true with the victims of terrorist violence. Therefore, the researcher had to be aware of his assumptions and prejudices, which may or may not be appropriate within the context of the assignment.

LIMITATIONS

The research will provide only the views of victims of paramilitary terrorism in the Inner and Outer East Belfast areas; however this limitation must not be overestimated because my analysis of the secondary sources have indicated a commonality of trend, which my findings have corroborated.



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Executive Summary

HRS Consultancy Services have produced this document in consultation with SOLAS – Victims' Support group. It has been carried out with the objective of ascertaining exactly what are the real needs of victims in Belfast and the Greater Belfast area, and to determine exactly how these might be met. This is a crucial document detailing their real needs and will serve well when designing future services and when approaching funders in the future. During the period of conflict, the voices of innocent victims of terrorist violence were unheard, or at best ignored whilst the Troubles and the ravages of conflict were having to be endured. A combination of lack of confidence, marginalisation, fear, intimidation and a focus on survival, prevented the articulation and representation of the victims' views. Only recently in the period of relative peace and stability, have many victims spoken for the first time about their pain and suffering.

Within this document, the research findings demonstrate that victims want to be heard and that they need the care and support that SOLAS provides. Their members feel the need to talk about what they had suffered as a result of the conflict to others who had similar experiences, to be listened to sympathetically and to do so in a safe, non-threatening environment. The committee and members of SOLAS are keen to promote and develop the group as a resource where people can express themselves, put their views forward and help all victims/survivors move beyond where they have been, and to learn the lessons of where they have come from. At a time when dealing with the past has become vitally important to providing a safe, peaceful, inclusive and responsible future, the work of SOLAS is a lynchpin in securing East Belfast's and indeed the Greater Belfast Area's

place in modern day peace-making.



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to this question. There are so many qualifiers that, to some extent, the answer must be specific to the study. The general rule is to make the sample as large as possible. Overall, large samples are better approximations of the target population than small samples. Sampling error decreases as sample size increases. However, practical restraints such as time, money and availability of potential subjects must enter into the decision. Factors that must be considered in making decisions about sample size include the type of study, number of variables, and the data analysis techniques.

Exploratory studies, both qualitative and quantitative and case studies use very small samples. A small sample size may better serve the researchers who are usually interested in examining the situation in depth from various perspectives, (Morgan, 1988).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher recognised that in order to achieve an overall impression of the real needs of the victims of paramilitary terrorism, a representative sample of users ought to be interviewed. The researcher identified this sample by taking 10% of the current membership of SOLAS, which included interviews with existing committee members, and interviews with local community activists and two related service providers within the sector to bring a wider perspective to the study.

This provided the primary data that facilitated the researcher in his work. An attempt was made to strike a balance with respect to gender, geographical location, age, committee/non-committee interviewees, member/non-member interviewees, relatives of victims of the conflict who have been murdered, and those who had been injured.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The semi-structured questionnaire was designed specifically to seek qualitative information from group members (see appendix 1). Its purpose is to ask open questions, which will ascertain the views of members. The responses to such questions will provide in-depth information on the feelings and opinions of members.

The guiding questions used with the members in the interviews were as follows: -

- As a victim of terrorism, how did this affect you and your family?

- What support and assistance was available?
- How did you and your family cope with the situation?
- Did other people outside the family unit help your situation?
- How do you feel victims' issues are being addressed by organisations independent of SOLAS?
- As a victim, what are your current needs?
- How has SOLAS helped you?
- How do you feel you will cope with the future?

With the other organisations interviewed, a semi-structured approach was used in gathering relevant information.

INTERVIEWS

Initial contact was made by telephone to clarify the objectives of the research. Confidentiality was assured and a commitment to proceed with the interview was agreed. Most interviews were carried out at the group's premises at 324a Upper Newtownards Road, Ballyhackamore, Belfast.

The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions to help the respondent understand exactly what was being asked, though still allowing enough openness for relevant information to be obtained. The provision of additional ideas and personal thoughts helped to improve and further enhance the benefit of the research project. Semi-structured questions also kept the interview on a specific and relevant line of questioning, preventing misinterpretation and minimising the chances of abstract and vague answers.

The researcher conducted some interviews with individuals, while others were conducted with couples; these lasted on average forty-five minutes.

The motives and intentions of the research were explained and respondents were assured of complete anonymity. They were also assured that they would be given access to the final transcript of the research.

INTERVIEWER BIAS

In order to maintain the highest possible level of objectivity, the primary questions were asked by the independent consultant. The researcher was aware when interviewing people that nothing is completely predictable, and this is particularly true with the victims of terrorist violence. Therefore, the researcher had to be aware of his assumptions and prejudices, which may or may not be appropriate within the context of the assignment.

LIMITATIONS

The research will provide only the views of victims of paramilitary terrorism in the Inner and Outer East Belfast areas; however this limitation must not be overestimated because my analysis of the secondary sources have indicated a commonality of trend, which my findings have corroborated.



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SOLAS Victims Support Group

NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT

April 2005 – Version 1

Prepared By:
Mr John Stinson
HRS Consultancy Services

Methodology

SOLAS is a victim support group set up in 2003 to provide a variety of services and activities for bereaved and injured victims of the conflict in Belfast and the Greater Belfast area.

It's aim is to ensure that those most affected by the Troubles have recourse to a non - political and non sectarian organisation which caters specifically for their needs and enables them to deal with their trauma and move on with their lives.

It provides counselling, befriending and advocacy services for innocent victims of various forms of terror, and provides a catalyst for informed discussion and in-depth research into victims' issues in an effort to highlight their needs to policy makers and statutory bodies. The fact that so many victims feel the necessity to form such groups is a sad reflection on the lack of statutory provision to deal with the multiple problems victims' experience – whether social, economic, physical or psychological.

The main function of the group, however, has been to provide a means by which those who had been deeply hurt and isolated could share their experiences with others who had suffered in similar ways and to whom they could more easily relate. It offers a range of help on practical issues, including counselling, advice on welfare rights, employment and education and training.

Membership of the group is growing all the time and there are 80 direct members plus their extended families, which broadens the overall figure to around 300 people. They have

a vital role to play in building a peaceful Northern Ireland.

THE RANGE OF SERVICES OFFERED

- Befriending/Visiting
- Training
- Employment and Education
- Basic Counselling
- Trauma Counselling
- Welfare Rights
- Social Events
- Group Support

Many of the individuals associated with SOLAS perceive themselves to be, directly or indirectly, victims of terrorist violence or to have suffered in other ways from the social and economic deprivation that has resulted as a direct consequence of such action. The group believes that many innocent people who have not been engaged in terrorism or its related criminality have been victims of it.

They have been affected by terrorist violence as a result of the murder of a loved one in their immediate family or in the wider family circle, or through their own or a family member's disability by terrorist violence or through intimidation. They have in turn suffered not only from that traumatic event but also from society's attitude and response to that tragedy.

Many innocent victims of terrorism have also, as a direct result of the loss of a loved one, suffered economically and have experienced severe social isolation. Families have been devastated and family relationships subjected to immense stress; careers have been destroyed and children have grown up without fathers, mothers or siblings. Many victims have, as a result of their experiences, felt the need to withdraw from society and are often wary of making contact with outside agencies. Including government and its agencies, as they feel that their situation makes them vulnerable.

Their community is recognised as an area that has, and indeed is still suffering severe political tensions i.e. including the consequences and fall out of recent paramilitary feuds. The community living within the area has probably experienced some of the most horrific events of the Troubles and is still trying to come to terms with many traumatic outcomes. The group understand that to achieve any long term benefits for their community there must be an emphasis placed on providing services for people still affected by sectarian murders, paramilitary shootings, imprisonment, bombings accompanied by anti-social behaviour and joy

riding.

SOLAS recognises however that the prospects of achieving any sustainable benefits for the community are greatly enhanced, by tackling these issues in a totally non sectarian approach, with at least a degree of cross community engagement.

DEPRIVATION

SOLAS is located in the Ballymacarret ward of East Belfast and deals primarily with the wider community from both Inner and Outer East Belfast. According to the Noble indicators the group have targeted areas that suffer from multiple deprivation. These areas are characterised by poor health, high unemployment, and low educational attainment.

Areas within Greater East Belfast such as Ballymacarret, Ballybeen and Tullycarnet are recognised as areas, which suffer from deprivation in both social and economic terms. The Policy Planning and Research Unit in a report entitled 'Relative Deprivation in Northern Ireland' have identified these areas as deprived. The multiple deprivations in the area are identified using a number of indicators. The area is characterised by:

- There are high levels of unemployment in Inner East Belfast (24%).
- High levels of long term unemployment.
- Low levels of educational attainment.
- High proportion of welfare dependents.
- Higher than average number of lone parent families.
- High age dependence ratio.
- Stigmatization and the adverse publicity.
- High proportion of household with incomes of under £10,000.

In a survey report – Jobseekers Evaluation – December 2000, it was identified that in East Belfast, as at December 1998, there were understood to be about 2,300 unemployed claimants, but this measure was believed to underestimate the total extent of unemployment, because of the unknown number of other people who were also unemployed but unable to claim. Of these about half were long-term unemployed who had been out of work for at least a year. This unemployment was particularly prevalent in Inner East Belfast, which is generally taken to comprise the wards of Ballymacarret, Island, The Mount and Woodstock. Between them these wards had slightly more than half of all the unemployed in East Belfast and a somewhat higher proportion of the long-term unemployed. That is still the case and Ballymacarret, Island and The Mount have been declared 'New TSN' priority areas because of their

significantly high numbers of long-term unemployed.

Young people living in these areas suffer more ill health and poorer mental health, are less likely to benefit from health and social care, have higher numbers of looked after children by Health Trusts, and have lower educational attainment and have higher numbers of non school attainments. Areas such as Ballymacarret, The Mount, Woodstock, Island and Tullycarnet that are located in the 10% most deprived electoral wards according to the Noble Indicators of multiple deprivation, are seen by this group as priority areas that need addressed in relation to health issues.

Leading from Behind: An Agenda for Change in East Belfast (March 2001) Neighbourhood Research Project as part of a Capacity Building Programme in 14 locally defined neighbourhoods:

- 828 households surveyed, contained 2039 individuals, 46.4% males and 53.6% females. 25% were under 16 years old and 18% were 60 and over.
- 46.8% of households had someone with a medical condition being treated by a doctor or hospital.
- 30.3% were receiving benefits related to illness.
- 31.6% felt that drug abuse was a problem locally and 47.9% said alcohol abuse was a problem.
- 19.5% of households had at least one person taking medication for nervous illness, stress and depression.
- Approximately 28% felt their quality of life was getting worse

A number of core issues were identified through the research, in relation to well-being the following were priorities for action:

- Alcohol and substance abuse were among the top three problems articulated by communities across East Belfast
- More support and Counselling Services for Stress and Depression are required
- Relevant, user friendly, health information is needed at neighbourhood level, especially among young men and boys

The group's work aims to address the legacy of the conflict through targeting areas and communities who have traditionally been exposed to specific problems generated by the conflict, and who need to be assisted to return to a peaceful and stable society. There is a focus on problems such as social distance, segregation and alienation, which have prevented people from these New TSN areas in achieving their potential, given the pressures and affects of the conflict. The group aims to realise the economic and employment opportunities which peace brings and shall promote social integration, inclusion and reconciliation.

The areas/communities identified have suffered from social and economic development as a result of the conflict. These are illustrated by demographic and labour market patterns/structures, and low levels of income, skills and qualifications, and consequently display high levels of deprivation.

As a result of the legacy of the conflict the majority of their members come from areas within Outer East Belfast, which are areas of polarisation and of extreme disadvantage with high levels of unemployment, low educational achievement and high levels of DHSS benefit dependency. Opportunities are being sought to bring people out of these areas and allows them to meet people from other communities.

Work is being done to take opportunities arising from peace through encouraging actions which have a stake in peace and which will actively promote a stable and normal society where opportunities can be developed arising primarily on account of the reduction in political unrest. There is a belief that peace has brought about the opportunity for people within our community to develop a new culture.

Traditionally people from these areas would not have considered accessing educational or training opportunities (a point reinforced by the Nobel Report) and therefore effectively exclude themselves from many of the new opportunities for employment due to their skills deficit. The climate is now changing and local people are now eager and willing to enter into the employment market. However, barriers exist as to where they access this training.

Through education and increasing the life skills of people from within these areas/communities they will be more able to engage in a process of reconciliation and mutual understanding. If confidence levels and social inclusion are promoted and realised, then people within this group shall be more able to articulate their view points and put forward their opinions constructively, whilst listening and engaging with other people from within Northern Ireland and between North and South.

STRATEGY

The group has established their strategic direction:

PRINCIPALS AND OBJECTS

1. To bring relief to persons in Belfast and the greater Belfast area who are suffering hardship, sickness or distress as a result of the conflicts in Northern Ireland;

2. To advance the education of the public in Belfast and the greater Belfast area and elsewhere in the effects of the conflict and especially the effects of the conflict on children;
3. To provide support and counselling services in Belfast and the greater Belfast area for victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

AIMS:

1. To help victims/survivors of the conflict rebuild their lives and reintegrate them back into society.
2. Provide help and advice to the innocent victims of the conflict, in order to help them develop as individuals and assure them that they are neither ignored nor forgotten.
3. To listen and understand victims needs, in a safe and support environment and to provide help, advice, support and representation.
4. Improve the quality of life of its members.
5. To improve opportunities for training and employment, especially for those suffering isolation and exclusion.
6. Work to promote the personal development and social re-integration of members who have been socially isolated and marginalised.
7. Accompaniment to Doctors/Hospital/Solicitor/Housing Executive or anywhere the participant may be apprehensive to attend alone.
8. To provide information on benefit entitlements and welfare rights.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To provide a safe environment for victims
2. To provide support services for victims
3. To deliver programmes of activity that will meet the needs of victims
4. To provide representation on behalf of victims.
5. To engage members in activities which will lead to empowerment and self – fulfilment.
6. To develop relationships with similar victims groups and share experiences and exploit networking opportunities.
7. To maximize the potential of participants in their chosen fields, eg. workplace/training.
8. Provide local people with skills, knowledge and opportunities to develop as individuals and become better members of their communities.

AREAS OF SUCCESS

Since the formation of SOLAS in 2003 the group has been successful in offering a supportive service for it's members.

Details of successes to date are as follows:

- Trips to London, Sligo and Dublin for members funded by themselves.
- Cultural and political awareness trips organised and funded through CRC.
- Public awareness project.
- Volunteering amongst members.
- Giving benefit advice.
- Signposting services and career advice.
- Coffee mornings.
- Barbeque for members and friends.
- Day trips to Bangor and Portrush.
- Counselling services.
- Practical support.
- Health and nutrition advice.
- Effective Networking.
- Basic computer awareness skills.
- Shopping trips for lady members.
- Visit to other victims groups to share experiences.
- Northern Ireland Memorial Fund Assistance Grants.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

They hope to obtain further funding to:

- Organise more trips for their members and days away for respite;
- Run more personal development courses;
- Undertake relevant research within their area;
- Develop the centre as a drop in facility;
- Undertake more outreach work;
- Assist carers and their families in providing respite breaks.



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SOLAS Victims Support Group

NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT

April 2005 – Version 1

Prepared By:
Mr John Stinson
HRS Consultancy Services

Executive Summary

HRS Consultancy Services have produced this document in consultation with SOLAS – Victims' Support group. It has been carried out with the objective of ascertaining exactly what are the real needs of victims in Belfast and the Greater Belfast area, and to determine exactly how these might be met. This is a crucial document detailing their real needs and will serve well when designing future services and when approaching funders in the future. During the period of conflict, the voices of innocent victims of terrorist violence were unheard, or at best ignored whilst the Troubles and the ravages of conflict were having to be endured. A combination of lack of confidence, marginalisation, fear, intimidation and a focus on survival, prevented the articulation and representation of the victims' views. Only recently in the period of relative peace and stability, have many victims spoken for the first time about their pain and suffering.

Within this document, the research findings demonstrate that victims want to be heard and that they need the care and support that SOLAS provides. Their members feel the need to talk about what they had suffered as a result of the conflict to others who had similar experiences, to be listened to sympathetically and to do so in a safe, non-threatening environment. The committee and members of SOLAS are keen to promote and develop the group as a resource where people can express themselves, put their views forward and help all victims/survivors move beyond where they have been, and to learn the lessons of where they have come from. At a time when dealing with the past has become vitally important to providing a safe, peaceful, inclusive and responsible future, the work of SOLAS is a lynchpin in securing East Belfast's and indeed the Greater Belfast Area's

place in modern day peace-making.



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