

What Participants Have to Say. . .

“I had discussions with people who I never thought I would have access to meet and it was a very moving experience.”

“I was touched at a deep level hearing other people’s stories and relating my own experiences, some of which remain surprisingly raw.”

“I took away great learning about what people were living with and how many stories have been silenced.”

“I found it very harrowing, but also enlightening— I gained a better understanding about people’s loss and suffering.”

“An interesting and varied introduction to a difficult area.”

“People felt free to explore issues in a safe environment.”

“A humbling experience that I was privileged to be a part of.”

“This worked for me and I hope the others who attended feel the same way.”

“Risk taking at its best!”



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Towards Understanding and Healing

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Coming to terms with, and making sense of, the legacy of the Troubles.

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Towards Understanding and Healing is an organisation that recognizes individual experience in the context of the larger story of conflict in Northern Ireland. Towards Understanding and Healing offers a safe space for people to begin to articulate personal stories, and also to listen to other stories or “truths” in a way that does not diminish their own experience. Because of Northern Ireland’s diverse history and culture, no one person can tell the story of the past thirty years.

This project emphasizes the need to bring together all of the disparate

narratives that comprise the story of Northern Ireland in order to better understand the effects of the past and the potential of the future.



Bringing people together for storytelling and dialogue.

Project History

Towards Understanding and Healing is a relatively new project which has resulted from the collaborative work of several organisations over a number of years. Launched in 2000 by Derry City Council and Holywell Trust, the project looked for ways to allow people to come to terms with, and make sense of, the legacy of the conflict and its consequences in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and wider Great Britain. In order to do this, a diverse range of people were brought together for a series of dialogue-based residential and conferences. The format was simple, but effective— participants shared their stories with people representing all aspects of the Troubles in an atmosphere that was both safe and respectful. Guest facilitators from a variety of international conflict and post-conflict situations provided insight into personal and collective healing. What resulted was powerful and effective. As one participant reported, “Sometimes the only way to respond to the truthful telling of a story is with your own story.”

Current Work

Over the years, the organisation has developed a two-pronged approach to facilitating important encounters. **Storytelling** allows participants to tell and hear personal stories in a fully supportive atmosphere. **Dialogue** provides participants with the opportunity to ask questions and have honest exchanges as critical issues are discussed. Both types of conversation happen in single-identity, as well as cross-community contexts. Safety is a key aspect of every encounter facilitated by the Project; however, participants are encouraged to allow themselves to be stretched and to grow as a result of these encounters.

Project Aims

The project seeks to:

- facilitate the coming together of individuals from diverse groups to tell and hear stories in a safe environment.
- Facilitate a dialogue that allows people to speak fully and be listened to whilst creating opportunities for the exploration of each other’s ideology, perceptions, attitudes and sense of history.
- To develop strategies that enable individuals to access further support structures which allow them to move forward.
- To maintain ongoing links and create new links to look at ways of sharing ideas, models and structures at local, national, and international levels; and to continually learn from other people’s post-conflict experience.

Staff

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