

Towards Understanding and Healing

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Quarterly Newsletter

Visit our website: www.thejunction-ni.org/towardsunderstandingandhealing.htm

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Dialogue Event Planned for July

After every storytelling residential, Towards Understanding and Healing asks participants, "What should happen next?"

And every time, we get a large group of people that say, "Storytelling is great, but I also want a chance to dialogue about the real issues facing us."

This July, past participants will get the chance to do just that.

Towards Understanding and Healing is pleased to announce that it will be hosting

a dialogue residential solely for TUH past participants.

Within the safety of small groups and the TUH process, Participants will be able to discuss certain pressing issues that have stemmed from the Troubles.

The event will also allow participants to possibly reconnect with those they've met before and to meet new people involved in TUH.

Spaces are extremely limited and will be allocated on a first

come, first served basis. Accommodation and meals are included.

Please contact Sara or Sarah as soon as possible for more information or to reserve your place at this event.

Dialogue Residential

25-27 July 2005

Busstown House Hotel

Coleraine, N. Ireland

Upcoming Events

Storytelling Residentials

These storytelling residentials are for both men and women in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain who have been affected by the Troubles.

Contact Sara or Sarah for more information.

20-22 May

The May residential is fully booked.

17-19 June

Spaces are still available for the June residential.*

*Because of high demand, TUH must now give preference to in-

dividuals who have never attended TUH storytelling events.

Past participants wanting to attend again are invited to place their names on a waiting list in the event that a space becomes available.

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Thoughts From Our Members

Editor's Note: I received this thoughtful and insightful letter from Brian Bethell, a past participant in Towards Understanding and Healing events. He has graciously given me permission to share it with all of you.

I have recently received the debut copy of TUH's newsletter...

It got me thinking about storytelling in general and the more I thought about it the more I came to realise that storytelling is not just about one particular incident we may have experienced but rather storytelling embraces much more than that...our own individual lives are probably the best or worse story we will ever tell. A lifelong narrative, which is made up of seemingly unconnected chapters, but like all good narratives, one has to find the central theme to stay with the story, to make sense of it especially when we recount it to others.

If one defines a story as the passing on of information in order to elicit a response, then from the banal (writing to the gas board explaining why your bill is overdue) to the beautiful (the Gaelic Seanachaidh who is relating tales of honour, great battles, love and sorrow at a Cèilidh to pass on the history of a race), a story is a story!

All my life I have told stories in one form or another. I would nip 'round to St. Malachy's and see who was saying mass, what colour the vestments were, and who from our street was attending, all proof of my going. I would then go and play and later tell my mother a wonderful story of how I was uplifted and edified by Father Connelly's homily. These stories were very short and my mother called them lies.

Most cultures depend on storytelling to keep the record pure and straight, and in the great oral traditions of the Native American, the Aborigines, and the Africans, to name but a few, then such purity is achieved. In western culture however we have come to depend on technology to keep the record pure and straight. We have others to keep the records for us: the media, politicians, teachers of history...all second hand, all with their own particular spin on the information they are passing on. Is this dependency on electronic record keeping the reason we find it difficult to relate a chapter of our own lifelong narrative to strangers?

Some stories are life changing insofar as they can change the life of a whole community or a single individual. Stories can be so painful that the retelling of them causes as much pain as did living the story itself. Some stories sadly are never told and will die away, and when that happens, that too changes the community as well as the individual whose story it is. We cannot, must not depend on others to get our story right, it is we who must tell our own story; it is we who must become the Seanachaidh at the Cèilidh.

Peace in NI is creeping up on us slow but sure and one of the most important elements of that peace must be the telling of the stories because...

"It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warriors. It is the story that outlives the sound of the war drums and the exploits of the brave fighter. It is the story that will save our progeny from blundering about like blind beggars – We don't own the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us." ~ Chinua Achebe

Signed,

Brian Bethell

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The Junction: Towards Understanding and Healing's Home

Most Towards Understanding Healing participants never get the chance to visit our offices, so we thought that we could bring our office to you!

TUH is housed in the Junction, a community relations resource and peace building centre based in Derry/Londonderry's city centre.

Located right off the Diamond on Bishop Street, the centre houses a resource library open to the public with materials relating to community relations, peace building, Northern Irish history and politics, mediation and facilitation, diversity, citizenship, etc.

The Junction is a welcoming, safe space for people to meet. It offers a conference room for hire, which means a wide variety of people and community groups are always coming in and out of the centre.

In addition, the Junction offers community relations programmes for a wide variety of groups, including schools, business groups, international delegations, and others.

The Junction is coordinated by Maureen Hetherington, one of TUH's founders and co-chairperson of the TUH management committee. Richie Hetherington is the Junction's administrator and welcomes visitors to the centre at the front reception desk. Sarah Lockhart splits her days between the Junction and Towards Understanding and Healing, doing project work for both.



The Junction staff, celebrating Sara Cook's birthday on 27 April. From left: Maureen Hetherington, Richie Hetherington, Sarah Lockhart, Sara Cook, Dushan Vurdelja, Karen Johnston, and Denise McDaid.

The Junction also recently welcomed Dushan Vurdelja, an international volunteer from Serbia, who will be working with the Junction for six months.

As most of you know, Sara Cook serves as coordinator of Towards Understanding and Healing. The rest of the team consists of Sarah Lockhart (the other half of the "American Sara/h duo") and Denise McDaid, who works in the afternoons as the administrator.

In addition to Towards Understanding and Healing, the Junction also houses the Derry City Shadow Council. The Shadow Council is a body associated with the Derry City Council and is made up of young people, aged 16 to 22 years, elected by their peers to represent

them and offer a youth perspective to the Derry City Council. In addition to monthly meetings in the Council chambers to discuss pressing issues, the Shadow Council offers leadership training and teambuilding activities. The Shadow Council is coordinated by Karen Johnston.

So that's the Junction team, and Towards Understanding and Healing is privileged to be associated with it.

As always, we extend an open invitation to all of you to stop by our offices, say "hello," and stay for a cup of tea.

You are also welcome to check out the resource library and find out about local events in the city as well. We hope to see you soon!

The Future of Towards Understanding and Healing

This September will mark two years for Towards Understanding and Healing as a fully-staffed, independent project, and it will also mark the end of the organisation's full funding through the European Union Peace II programme.

These two years have been an exciting and productive time. The first several months involved laying much of the groundwork for the project, developing policies, refining methodology, and networking with other organisations and individuals. In January 2004, we hosted a community workers residential that allowed participants to explore their own stories and their roles

within their organisations. July 2004 saw the beginning of near-monthly events with the first Women's Storytelling Residential. September brought the large international dialogue conference ("When the Fighting Stops..."), followed by an introduction to storytelling for community workers in October. A second women's storytelling residential took place in November, and many of our past participants met up again at our Christmas party in December.

In 2005, we hosted storytelling residencies in both February and March, and two more are scheduled for May and June.

Finally, we hope to round off this funding period with a July dialogue residential for past participants in storytelling events (see front page).

The TUH management committee is intent on continuing the work of the project and is currently pursuing several funding options. Recently, spaces on our storytelling residencies have been filling quickly, and we've been contacted by many people referred on by you, our participants.

It's clear that the type of safe storytelling and dialogue that TUH offers is very much needed and wanted. It is our hope and mission to continue this work into the future.

Thoughts From Our Members... (continued from page 2)

This note was received from one of our past participants, with a message for all of you:

I hope you are all keeping well and looking forward to a warm summer! I just wanted to say that I was delighted to get the opportunity (though TUH) to meet with people whom I would not have otherwise met had I not participated in the TUH meetings.

The get-togethers were important to me as sometimes I feel very isolated in the Republic.

I also thought the sessions were very well run - very professional.

I hope to meet you all again sometime.

Kind Regards,
Mairead Bolger

Towards Understanding and Healing is an organisation that recognises the individual experience in the context of the larger story of conflict in Northern Ireland. TUH 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.

We Want To Hear From You!

Do you have some news or thoughts to share with the TUH community? The newsletter is a way for all of us to keep in touch with each other. Write to Sarah via email (see right) or post (see front page).

Newsletter written & edited by:

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