



Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme

Executive Summary of 2012-2013





Foreword

Irene Sherry, Head of Victims Services Ashton Community Trust

This executive summary contains the highlights of work that Bridge of Hope carried out during 2012-2013 in the field of transitional justice with communities at grassroots level in Belfast. It expands and extends the initial insights provided by Eilish Rooney, (Associate, Transitional Justice Institute) in a report that analysed our pilot transitional justice programme in 2010-2012 (available via www.thebridgeofhope.org)

This executive summary provides details of 12 key findings and associated recommendations for building this work into the future.

This 2012-2013 programme was gender focused and the recommendations in themselves illustrate that the legacy of the conflict affected women in different ways than men, although commonalities do exist.

The recommendations are extensive and maybe interpreted as aspirational. Importantly they reflect the belief that NI's power sharing government is positive and that it is working. At the same time participants felt there were outstanding areas of action needed especially in socio-economic terms. Societal challenges such as suicide and mental health were also listed as substantial areas of concern.

Bridge of Hope has been talking to individuals in Belfast most affected by the conflict as part of this transitional justice programme since 2010 and as a tool for exploring difficult conflict related issues we have found it invaluable and extremely enlightening.

Most importantly perhaps is that past participants found the whole process illuminating and wanted to learn more about this framework and share it with others.

Conflict always involves contextual opposing points of origins and like any other 'transitional' society attempting to deal with its troubled past, it is clear to see our conflict runs deep. To this end, conversations about how we rebuild after decades of violence and achieve change together but yet address what 'happened in the past' continue to spark fierce debate. A key strength of this work however is its capacity to facilitate conversations with communities from different perspectives. During this latest transitional justice



programme honest exchanges did take place around experiences of truth, reconciliation, prosecution & amnesty, institutional reform and reparations and they were respectful at all times which is a credit to each and every participant. The sessions were expertly facilitated by Eilish Rooney and our heartfelt gratitude goes to her for her ongoing contribution to the programme.

We hope that those with interest in this field and particularly those at government level examining 'dealing with the past' issues take cognisance of this work, reports and accompanying outputs and note its capacity and relevance to build, from the ground up, a healthy and informed post conflict society.



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- Betty Carlisle – Manager, Shankill Women's Centre
- Tim Cunningham - PhD student TJI
- Fablab at Ashton Community Trust
- Lisa Gormley - Institute Administrator, TJI
- Dr Myrtle Hill - former Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at Queen's University Belfast
- Professor Patricia Lundy - Institute for Research on Social Sciences at UU
- Elaine McCoubrey – Secretary, TJI
- Susan McCrory - Manager Falls Women's Centre
- Professor Monica McWilliams – Former NI Human Rights Commissioner
- Dr Catherine O'Rourke - Gender Research Coordinator at TJI
- Bebhinn Ni Bhriain - Department for Social Development
- Professor Bill Rolston – Director of TJI
- Irene Sherry – Head of Victims Services at Ashton Community Trust
- Aoibhinn Treanor - Clerk to the NI Assembly's Public Accounts Committee
- TJI at UU
- Lindsay Whitten - Operations Manager Bridge of Hope

What is Transitional Justice? This is a form of justice associated with times of political change. It is a term given to a range of legal and non legal ways a society undertakes to deal with past human rights abuses. This includes: institutional reform, truth commission, reparations, reconciliation, prosecution and amnesty. This strong focus on the past is matched by a concern with social reconstruction and reconciliation.

Why Transitional Justice? Bridge of Hope has developed a specific conflict related initiative called the Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme with Eilish Rooney at TJI. This was developed in response to NI's changing social landscape and specifically to the local circumstances in North Belfast. It is now 15 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and yet many people are only beginning to discuss in earnest how we deal with what happened in the past.



These conversations include discussions around what mechanisms should be put in place to benefit victims and survivors and how communities move from the post conflict phase to strive for a more equitable and fair society. This bespoke grassroots programme is centred on the grounded principle that people living in areas that experienced the worst impacts of the conflict have a vital contribution to make to the work of dealing with the past. To date, individuals from Falls, Shankill, Mount Vernon, Tigers Bay and New Lodge have taken part, made important contributions and shaped the programme in critical ways.

The 2012-2013 programme involved over 20 women from Falls and Shankill Women's Centres. All participated in a fast track Transitional Justice residential before completing a 3 month Grassroots Toolkit (Rooney, 2012 available at www.thebridgeofhope.org) programme. The participants 'graduated' at the TJI in Jordanstown on International Human Rights Day December 10, 2012. At that event former Human Rights Commissioner and TJI Professor Monica McWilliams awarded the certificates and commented on the highly innovative nature of the programme saying: "Eilish Rooney and [Bridge of Hope] have managed to put together a course and a toolkit that I haven't seen anywhere else in the world."

During the programme the women also contributed towards the creation of a unique transitional justice jigsaw to reflect their individual and collective journey and their hopes for the future. This artistic expression of 'transitional justice' from such a local interpretation is we understand another world first. As a piece of many parts, it captures many individual experiences and hopes for the future, and 'glues' them all together as one.

In relation to the potential of this work Director of TJI, Professor Bill Rolston has stated that this programme which explores transitional justice "seems to have provided a sound grounding to move forward in the process of conflict transformation in North Belfast" (Foreword, Bridge of Hope report, Rooney, 2012).

Summary of 12 Key Findings and Recommendations

1 Finding: This Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme enabled critical conversations and provided a basis for conflict analysis at both single identity and cross community levels. This aspect of learning and sharing perspectives on issues such as policing, justice systems, dealing with the past, and reconciliation was found by participants to be a sound basis for an informative exchange of experiences and perspectives. It effectively provided a snapshot of how grassroots communities are reacting to and coping with transition. It showed where local stresses exist and where potential for common interests lie.

Recommendation: Ashton Community Trust should deliver the training manual and Grassroots Toolkit in selected urban and rural settings that experienced some of the worst impacts of the conflict with a view to broadening out delivery of this innovative programme across the region.

2 Finding: This programme successfully tested the Grassroots Toolkit and showed its potential to capture experiences of individuals from various backgrounds.

Recommendation: Accompanying materials are needed to complement the toolkit. Ashton Community Trust to develop a training manual.

3 Finding: High levels of participation indicated a strong interest in accredited community based learning in transitional justice.

Recommendation: This work in transitional justice should become an accredited module or course. As a result of Bridge of Hope's training experience in the fields of personal and professional development as well as conflict/legacy Ashton Community Trust should proactively investigate exploring this avenue with TJI with whom it has a substantial positive and good working relationship.

4 Finding: A core strength of this programme was the collective nature of reflection on women's gendered conflict experience. Working in a group setting, in this case a cross community setting, provided the right backdrop and context for extremely important learning and sharing.

Recommendation: Future programming should design around the format of group type settings, including residential and group sessional work right from the start, in order to secure a similar degree of experiential richness.

5 Finding: The programme fostered strong levels of engagement amongst women from disadvantaged areas. It was important to these women that their voices were 'heard'. Women's experiences during the conflict were markedly different to those of the men who previously participated in the pilot TJ programme (Rooney, 2012). Women recorded 'hidden harms' as significant. This included such things as loss of childhood; loss of life/job opportunities; burden on women when men were imprisoned; and impacts on family life. The programme drew upon each group's own resources and community resilience.

Recommendation: Stimulate and promote engagement at grassroots level, especially from women around post conflict and resolution issues, in order to strengthen any forthcoming government initiative for 'dealing with the past'.

6 Finding: Bread and butter issues are significant to people living in disadvantaged districts. Both Falls and Shankill wards are in the top 5 most deprived areas according to NISRA multiple deprivation indices. Participants said they want increased opportunities for a better life including better health outcomes, educational skills and meaningful employment.

Recommendation: The findings of this report and executive summary should be sent to agencies on a cross departmental level who have responsibility for addressing the legacy of the conflict and health and life inequalities.

7 Finding: Participants did not want the legacy of the conflict to negatively impact on future generations.

Recommendation: In response to this Ashton Community Trust to actively engage with the Commission for Victims and Survivors on the experience of this programme.

8 Finding: Shared Government is operational. Significant areas of concern/reforms, however, were listed in the course of the programme around young people, economics, life opportunities and efforts around dealing with the past. Generally most felt confident about how devolution is working.

Recommendation: Ashton Community Trust to investigate how these women's voices can be better heard by government

9 Finding: Comparative study of other countries coming out of conflict generated curiosity and provided a 'real time' sense of transitional justice in action. It encouraged and informed participants by placing the local process within a global context.

Recommendation: Ashton Community Trust's proposed training manual to integrate international case studies of transitional justice processes/techniques/mechanisms.

10 Finding: Participants noted that a 'phased truth sharing' process is happening, via separate initiatives such as the Historical Enquiries Team, coroner's office and community initiatives. This is independent of any formal government strategy around how the truth behind the conflict can or should be revealed. The participants felt that community initiatives such as Community Restorative Justice and NI Alternatives have a vital confidence building role in this process.

Recommendation: Ashton Community Trust to work with others in the promotion of best practice around 'dealing with the past'.

11 Finding: Addressing the mental health needs of communities, especially where the conflict hit hardest, was another area where participants felt there should be improvements. This echoes findings of the Commission for Victims and Survivors 2011 'Troubled Consequences' Report which noted the "pervasive and protracted toxicity of psychological trauma on the health of the Northern Irish Community". This report found evidence of a "large amount of unmet mental health need".

Recommendation: Ashton Community Trust should continue to advocate sensitively for resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of those communities and individuals most affected by the conflict



12 Finding: This transitional justice programme is being developed internationally as a model for learning exchange and resolution techniques by TJI staff with people from conflict and post-conflict contexts in Syria, Uganda and Kenya. Bridge of Hope's achievements in this field were also highly praised by international human rights activists and NGOs undertaking TJI's Annual Summer School in June 2013.

Recommendation: Upon completion of training manual Ashton Community Trust should seek to promote this programme in any relevant international network and/or local government related sector.

Links:

Ashton Community Trust: www.ashtoncentre.com

Bridge of Hope: www.thebridgeofhope.org

Transitional Justice Grassroots Engagement and Toolkit (E. Rooney 2012)
available to download via: www.thebridgeofhope.org

Transitional Justice Institute: www.transitionaljustice.ulster.ac.uk

Commission for Victims and Survivors report 'Troubled Consequences:
A report on the mental health impact of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland':
<http://www.cvsni.org/images/stories/publications/CNA/pdfs/cvsni-troubled-cons-web-opt.pdf>

OFMDFM Strategy for Victims and Survivors November 2009:
<http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/strategy-for-victims-and-survivors-november-2009.pdf>