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Building Resilience

CONTENTS

- » Chairman's Introduction p2
- » Northern Ireland: The Mental Health Legacy: Prof Peter McBride p3
- » Case study – Teach O'scail p5
- » International Fund for Ireland Commits £3.6m/€4.3m to 32 Community Projects p2
- » Case Study – Black Mountain Shared Space p5
- » Project Updates p6

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Supporting young people to develop positively despite growing up in challenging and difficult environments, has been a longstanding priority for the International Fund for Ireland.

Resilience is not something that people either have or do not have – it can be learned and taught. Capacity exists within all of us to adapt and employ new ideas and approaches that enable progression when things get tough.

However, support is not always open or accessible to those who need it most. Often the Fund's remit brings us close to vulnerable people who have suffered or continue to suffer as a result of the conflict. Our programmes, particularly those delivered in the last five years, have been successful in engaging groups and individuals who face a multitude of complex risks to change their circumstances.

Suicide rates in Northern Ireland have been the highest of the UK regions for the last two years. Shockingly more people have taken their lives in this region in the 18 years that followed the Troubles than were killed during the 30 years of conflict. Though mental wellbeing is not within the scope of the Fund, building resilience against a range of difficult influences is a core part of our delivery - as the following pages demonstrate.

We're particularly grateful to Professor Peter McBride, the Group Chief Executive of NIAMH who has penned an expert article on the residual effect of conflict-related trauma on young

lives. His views are thought-provoking and indicate that resilience is not just about those considered vulnerable, but is a wider societal concern.

With the backing of all our donors, the Fund has long been at the forefront of supporting people to raise their aspirations and make positive choices that can rebuild their lives and their communities. The achievements of our approach are significant and continue to set us apart from other funders.

Dr Adrian Johnston
CHAIRMAN

International Fund for Ireland Commits £3.6m/€4.3m towards 32 Community Projects

The latest package brings total funding to more than £6.5m/€8m funding in 2016

The allocation, approved at the organisation's recent Board Meeting in Newcastle, County Down, will see £2.1m/€2.6m shared among 17 projects that are working to address difficult issues linked to the legacy of conflict and will engage with young people who are at risk of becoming involved in sectarian or anti-social activity.

More than £804,000/€966,000 will be shared among 10 new projects that will support vulnerable young people who are unable to access or remain in traditional education. It will encourage young people to take part in good relations activities and transform their lives by providing alternatives to violence, crime and addiction. A further £612,000/€735,000 has been allocated to five initiatives that are developing new dialogue on the future of Peace Walls.

Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland, said: "Since our Community Consolidation – Peace Consolidation Strategy 2016- 2020 launched last year, we've invested with confidence in bold projects that have



enabled communities to reverse the severe effects of division and divert young people away from the influence of armed gangs.

"However, community appetite for these initiatives is much greater than the resources we alone can assign to it. The time is right for others to adopt and support Fund interventions and deliver on the promise of a shared society that is free from sectarianism and the shadow

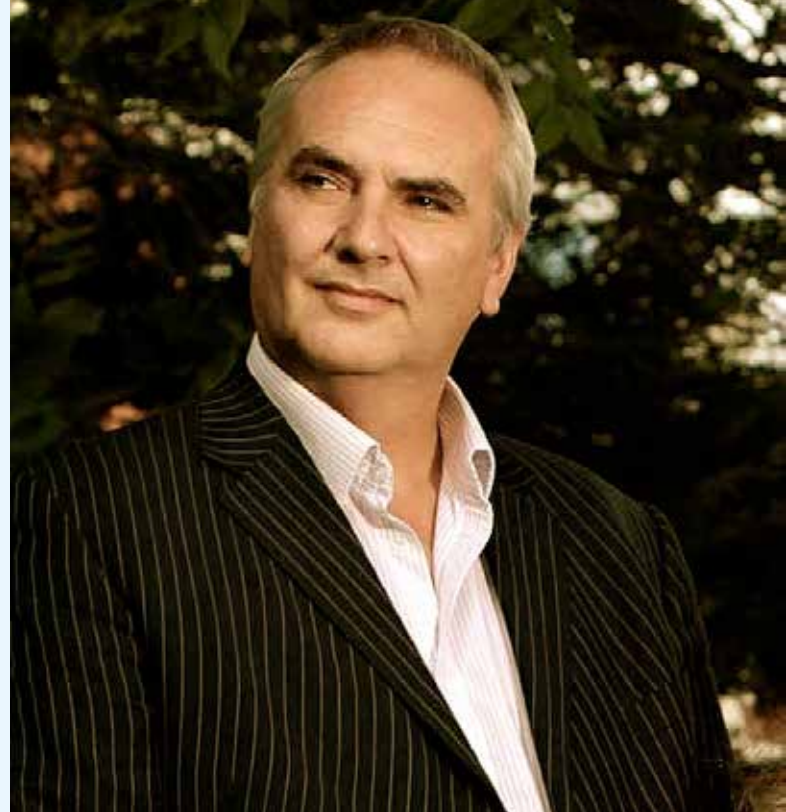
of paramilitaries." More information on the latest funding package is available at www.internationalfundforireland.com

ABOVE: Pictured at the Board Meeting in Newcastle are Board Members: (L-R) Billy Gamble; Paddy Harte; Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman; Allen McAdam; and Hilary Singleton.

Prof Peter McBride

NORTHERN IRELAND: THE MENTAL HEALTH LEGACY...

'In Ireland we have a common history but not a common memory.' With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, Northern Ireland began a transition to the next stage of its journey towards peace.



Over the period from 1969 to 1998 it is well documented that over 3,500 people lost their lives as a direct result of the conflict. However, it has been much more difficult to measure the legacy impact of the Troubles. Those who are left with physical injuries make present in society a very tangible reminder of the terrible consequences of violence, however those with psychological injuries carry much less visible scars.

The struggle that we have had as a society to agree how we deal with these psychological legacy issues reflects both a lack of consensus on how we define "victimhood", alongside an anxiety about how we manage the scale of the impact, were we to acknowledge that it was extensive. There is the need to develop a framework to describe the psychological impact of Northern Ireland's violent past, not only to account for those directly affected, but also to include the broad societal effects, which, when left unacknowledged, compromise time and time again our efforts to make a sustainable peace.

Such a framework might structure those in society within three groups.

Firstly those psychologically affected directly by the conflict. For these individuals, their symptoms are directly attributable to violent experiences, and within this group there are high levels of clinically diagnosed PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Research carried out by the Bamford Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, which is based at the Magee campus of Ulster University, and the Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation (NICTT), presented findings in 2011 indicating that Northern Ireland had the highest rates of PTSD in the world.

This research estimated that violence had been a distinctive cause of mental health problems for over 18,000 people in NI, and that nearly 40% of the population have had a conflict related traumatic incident. There have been a number of research initiatives like this one that have sought to quantify this direct impact, however what is much more difficult to quantify is the indirect impact, and for this we must consider other data.

The second group a framework might identify are those who are living with serious mental illness, but who do not necessarily personally link their illness to conflict, i.e. they don't identify themselves as victims or survivors. According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) study in 2012, the lifetime prevalence of mental health problems among the general population in NI is 48.6%, this is higher than any other part of the UK.

It does not seem unreasonable that at least part of the reason for this is that the experience of living through violence subsequently compromises a

population's psychological resilience, leading to the possibility of increased levels of mental health problems. There would be significant value in further research to explore these links.

The third, and most problematic, categorisation in a new framework, is based on the assertion that living through years of violent conflict results in a residual impact on all members of a population. If this is true, the psychological legacy of the Troubles resides not only in those directly affected and those struggling with a diagnosed mental illness, but also with the rest of us, who do not fall within either of these categories.

While this is extremely difficult to evidence in the same scientific models as the prevalence of disease, it can be better understood as a sociological phenomenon.

Individuals and societies that live with ongoing violence, and the threat of violence, over extended periods – 30 years in NI, develop coping mechanisms, defence mechanisms, to manage the threat. These societal psychological defences become normalised over time, and do not disappear when peace arrives. A society that has adapted to cope with war, does not necessarily easily adapt to peace when it comes.

Further, the very characteristics that are required by a society to

consolidate peace are the ones most often compromised by years of conflict. The qualities of trust, forgiveness, compromise, generosity, empathy, understanding and friendliness are all required to construct a meaningful peace, but are extremely difficult to exhibit when psychologically we have been conditioned to expect conflict and threat.

If there is merit in this model, it leads to conclusions about how services might be constructed. Based on the evidence, there is clearly and obvious rationale for the provision of trauma informed psychological services for victims and survivors.

However, the debate about the provision of psychological services to victims and survivors has been complicated and compromised by the politicisation of the issue, and the conflation of psychological needs with the needs for truth recovery, justice and restitution.

If the above framework has merit, it is that it extends the scope of the psychological legacy of the conflict both in terms of its definition and its scale. It moves it away from being an

exclusively clinical issue (i.e. PTSD), to having a broader social impact. It moves it from being located exclusively within a defined group of victims and survivors, to the whole of society.

Using this framework as a template, we should provide quality trauma services to the first group of those directly affected; we should provide trauma informed clinical services to the second group of those living with mental illness, and we should make psychological resilience services easily available to the rest of the population.

Because of the heightened political and social sensitivities, it is important that these services are not identified as "victim and survivor services", and they should certainly not all come under the banner of trauma services. These are probably best characterised as "Community Resilience Services".

Destigmatising mental health issues, and encouraging positive help seeking behaviour are key to the effective uptake and delivery of such services.

Considering carefully the use of different language that de-pathologises and

de-stigmatises mental health issues is critically important. Whatever the source of their distress, people will be much more likely to access services that improve their wellbeing, build their resilience, and give them hope.

If those services are appropriately constructed, taking account of the psychological impact of the conflict directly and indirectly on each one of us, then the struggle of dealing with the past can be transformed into the challenge of building the future.

Peter McBride is Group Chief Executive of NIAMH. NIAMH is one of the largest social enterprises on the island of Ireland, providing services North and South, as well as in Great Britain.

NIAMH provides a range of mental health and learning disability services delivered in the community and the workplace and in a variety of specialist settings. Peter is Visiting Professor at the University of Ulster Bamford Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

BELOW: Riot police divide a North Belfast interface.



CASE STUDY:

Black Mountain Shared Space Project

Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP) has been working in West Belfast for several years and is supported through the Fund's Peace Wall and Peace Impact Programmes.

The areas involved with this project in Belfast continue to deal with legacy issues stemming from the Troubles. Typically, both the Catholic and Protestant communities are susceptible to high levels of social deprivation including low incomes, low educational attainment, a lack of employability, mental health issues and disability.

The project focuses on interface barriers, good relations and shared space and in an effort to build resilience further within the area, the team have developed a programme to complement the existing peace walls project providing opportunities for the most marginalised adults and young people.

Seamus Corr, from BMSSP says, "Residents

face the legacy of conflict in a number of ways on a daily basis be it through intergenerational trauma, long-term disability or the effects of institutionalisation. These issues are all prevalent against the backdrop of the Million Brick Wall, against the backdrop of the Million Brick Wall, the largest Peace Wall in Belfast.

"Marginalisation and a lack of investment in these inner city communities mean that they literally have been left behind. Our role is to tackle these challenges head on and provide a mix of training and mentoring to the most at risk residents. We believe that this allows individuals to begin a personal journey that could result in both greater economic and community engagement and participation."

The project works with a mix of individuals and groups to link into any support services that they may need such as mental health teams, youth teams, community centres, and job and benefits offices.



Seamus believes that the positivity of the project has had a knock on effect and other marginalised young people are now considering training and opportunities too: "We've had some great success stories on both sides of the interface through our work including a young man who had been let down by many local services. He has now got his confidence back through an NVQ and has a job offer in the wings when he completes the course.

Seamus adds; "Reducing and overcoming these barriers will in time improve emotional wellbeing for participants. We strongly believe that attitudes towards education, social inclusion and other limiting factors will change too. We are hopeful that this programme will increase resilience within the community and begin to build relationships and opportunities for all."

ABOVE: Participants from the BMSSP youth project.

CASE STUDY:

Teach Oscail

Teach Oscail is based in Tullacmongan on the outskirts of Cavan town. It received support from the Fund in November 2015 for a yearlong project that targets at risk youth from housing estates in the area.

The project operates against a challenging backdrop of poor housing and high unemployment rates and many of the young people are vulnerable and often suffer from mental health issues.

Bernie Brady, project co-ordinator has experienced the challenges within the area. She works alongside other partners to teach young people how to feel valued and helps them build a fuller and more meaningful life.

"This year has been particularly tough for the area. High levels of drug use are the



norm here and since the beginning of the year we've had three suicides.

"Our role is to tackle ongoing challenges and present supportive, positive programmes aimed to unlock potential and also deal with personal issues. We also provide a counselling service so participants have the opportunity to build their confidence and get back on the right track in life."

The project offers a wide variety of training programmes to engage young people including: computer training, horticulture, first aid, physical fitness, parenting classes and addiction awareness programmes. The courses encourage people to overcome diversity by embracing the positives in their lives.

Bernie believes that motivation and building self-esteem are the building blocks to a brighter future for participants.

"We encourage kids to firstly become Youth leaders within the community giving them ownership of tasks as well as responsibility for outcomes. Many of the courses help to improve low self-esteem

and we also aim to involve them with community decisions. This enables them to feel they are contributing to the issues facing the town.

"Through our support, participants have been able to complete a number of courses and we are particularly proud of two of the guys this year. One youth has had a troubled past including a spell in prison but he is now actively engaged in a course and attends class every day.

"Another success story is a young mum who has overcome alcohol issues. She is currently enrolled in a number of courses and aiming to build a solid future for her whole family."

Thanks to the unique approach and support network at Tullacmongan, Bernie and her team are continuing to offer the opportunities to build resilience within the local community and above all young people now have a real sense of pride and optimism for their future.

LEFT: Young people from Teach Oscail engaged in a media project.

Triax – Peace Walls Programme

‘Trust must be built and residents encouraged to build new relationships.’ That was the message at a major seminar in Londonderry/Derry that asked how communities could begin to consider a future without physical barriers. Organised by the Triax Peace Walls Project the event enabled local residents to hear how communities in north Belfast have worked together to unlock a range of social benefits and build trust so a contentious Peace Wall could be removed. Pictured at the event is Johnny Byrne, Ulster University; Rab McCallum of TASCIT; Donna McCloskey, TRIAX Peace Walls Project Coordinator; and Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland.



Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium – Peace Walls Programme

In October, Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium launched a new research report that provides referencing tools for individuals and groups that assist communities to discuss and remove Peace Walls. The International Fund for Ireland addressed the event on its Peace Walls Programme model and offered reflections on the Consortium’s principles for interface barrier removal and transformation. Pictured at the launch are Barbara McAtamney, Department of Justice; Jessica Blomkvist, author of the report and Billy Gamble, Board Member, International Fund for Ireland.



Football in the Community – Peace Impact Programme

Local residents and community representatives came together in October to cheer on teams from Sligo FC, Ballinamallard FC, Donegal Youth Services and Tubbercurry FITC at a special soccer tournament held in Ballinamallard football grounds. The occasion marked the latest participants’ success in the 2016 Football in the Community Programme, a cross-community and cross-border relations project. Managed by Sligo Young Enterprises the three-year innovative youth training project uses football as a medium to engage young people and has trained more than 60 young people between the ages of 16-25 years in its duration. Pictured are (back row) Tom Elliott MP; Catherine Ryan, IFI Programme Manager; Hilary Singleton, Board Member, International Fund for Ireland and Ciaran Kelly, Project Manager with project coaches and participants.

