

Fund



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

FOCUS

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Inside

**Chairman's
Introduction**
Pg 1



Alex Kane
Page 2



**Dundalk Youth
Centre (PIP)**
Page 3



**TASCIT
(PWP)**
Page 4



**CRUN
(PYDP)**
Page 6



Chairman's Introduction

As we look ahead to the launch of the Fund's new Strategy – 'Connecting Communities 2021 – 2024' next year it is important to take a step back and evaluate how far we've come as an organisation and as individual communities. Assessing our achievements and lessons learned has provided the foundation for planning for the next phase of work for the Fund.



Most of the last year has been dominated by Covid-19 and the challenges that came with a pandemic that most of us have never witnessed in our lifetime. Prior to this, however, many of our funded groups, across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties have been dealing with a range of issues that are impacting how they operate and engage daily.

The uncertainty of Brexit and its impact on border relations, the absence of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland up until earlier this year and an uncertain economic landscape – these have all combined to create unforeseen challenges for many communities still living with a sense of fragility.

As we look ahead to what we can achieve in the next four years, it is our belief that the Fund has a unique role to play in ensuring the connections painstakingly built up across borders and across communities are protected and nurtured.

This edition of Fund Focus looks at the key achievements over the last five years, what we have learned and how we are using these learnings to plan for the future of the communities we support. You will hear first-hand from community leaders on the challenges

they face and how they've worked to overcome these for the benefit of their communities.

The previous strategy (2016 – 2020) was specifically developed to deliver positive community transformation through peace building, reconciliation and capacity building with communities most impacted by the Troubles, particularly those that have not previously participated in such activities.

Young people have been successfully diverted away from paramilitary/criminal recruitment towards employability through the Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP). Sensitive engagement continued through the Peace Impact Programme (PIP) when stability and peace were threatened, and difficult conversations have also enabled positive progress around the removal of physical barriers to peace.

Over the last five years, the Fund has delivered tailored interventions in marginalised communities. Against a challenging backdrop of political uncertainty and deepening division, this role is more important than ever.

While evaluating the impact of our current programmes we identified the need to introduce a platform for further cross-border engagement and support during what will be an uncertain time post Brexit transition. Our new

Communities in Partnership Programme will further embed cross-border co-operation, building resilience in the face of uncertainty and friction and support the development of local leadership.

The Fund is committed and well positioned to deliver this next phase of work, but we also acknowledge that we cannot do this alone. We will continue to engage with all our partners to ensure a coordinated approach to achieving a sustainable peace for local communities.

I would like to acknowledge the support the Fund has received from the British and Irish Governments as well as from our range of donors - the United States, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and we look forward to continuing this relationship throughout the next phase of work.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue rectangular background. The signature appears to read 'Paddy Harte'.

Paddy Harte, Chairman

Ensuring no one is left behind



By:
Alex Kane

The conclusion to the IFI's Strategy 2021-24 is stark, sobering and accurate: *'Despite the overall benefits of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, the reality remains that the implementation of the Agreement will take generations to deliver its ambition of peace and reconciliation.'* Worryingly, since a generation is usually calculated as being somewhere between 25-30 years, the timescale for delivering on the hopes and optimism of 1998 still seems to be a daunting, mountain-high task.

In his book, *Altruism, Intergroup Apology, Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, Professor Samuel Oliner argues; 'Reconciliation implies a restoration of conditions prior to the rupture in a relationship.' He also quotes the reconciliation scholar Luc Hayes, who describes reconciliation as both a goal and a process with three stages: 'achievement of peaceful coexistence, building of confidence and trust and (the) generation of empathy.'

I would add something else: a reconciliation process can only be truly, fully successful if it begins at the point at which the combatants/political opponents have agreed that they want to move forward in common cause, common purpose and towards the same end goal. That is not the case in Northern Ireland; where we have, I fear, a process which remains a conflict stalemate rather than a process capable of producing conflict resolution. And that's because the source of the 'rupture' Oliner spoke of in Northern Ireland's case, the constitutional question remains unresolved and continuously divisive. Unionists still want a United Kingdom. Nationalists still want a United Ireland.

Post-conflict reconciliation is never easy, not least because memories are long, grief is personal, forgiveness is not universal, not everyone views compromise as the 'right thing to do' and the trust and empathy mentioned by Hayes is easily, often unexpectedly, ripped apart. But post-conflict reconciliation is, I think, always easier if there is no ongoing dispute over the constitutional status of the country even if there are other huge questions which need to be addressed and resolved.

So, how to build reconciliation in Northern Ireland, when the two primary communities (still accounting for around 80% of those who vote) want entirely different constitutional outcomes? The point I'm trying to make is that everything in Northern Ireland is judged by the two primary communities on the impact it will have on their identity and the damage it might do to their constitutional ambitions. And I really do mean everything, by the way. Culture. Legacy. Cooperation. Power-sharing. Road signage. Brexit. Covid. Cross-border cooperation. The NI Executive's Programme for Government.

One of the hardest, ugliest realities in Northern Ireland is that the past is always in front of us. Not just one past, either. Both communities have their own past, their own narrative, their own grievances and their own solutions for the way forward. That's what makes reconciliation so difficult. That's why, 25 years since what we understand as the 'Peace Process' began, so little has

changed in terms of how we 'do' political business together. It also explains why we seem to have ended up with an Executive which is, in essence, two competing governments around the same table.

And that is why the work of the IFI which also has the crucial advantage of being independent from government remains essential. While reconciliation, in the sense that it is normally understood, will continue to be a 'hard sell' within the existing constitutional parameters, we still need to learn to live with each other and to share with each other. Far too many people from all sides and none believe they have been left behind by the peace/political process. Far too many still trot out the manta, "sure this place is never going to change." Far too many still fear that 'themuns' on the other side always get things their own way.

In its *The Difference The Fund is Making* paper (March 2020) the IFI set out some of the current challenges: Political uncertainty; Brexit; Violence (particularly linked to pockets of on-the-ground paramilitarism); and Socio/Economic (with marginalised communities and thousands of young people suffering from various manifestations of deprivation). To that list should now be added Covid, the long term economic consequences of which could be devastating especially for the already disadvantaged and deprived.

The challenge for IFI is to bring renewed hope. Hope which has previously been fuelled by its *Peace Impact Programme*, which 'places particular emphasis on engaging with disaffected and marginalised young people who are vulnerable to recruitment or attack by those opposed to the Peace Process. The reference in the March 2020 paper to '5974 First-Time Peace Builders' took me by surprise (and I'm rarely surprised, by the way). For a start, I don't think any political party in NI has that many members. Even more surprising, that figure applies to just one year. 5974 people many of them young learning that they aren't going to be left behind.

Let me conclude with a thought which has just come to me. Ensuring that, where possible, no one is left behind, is a key element of reconciliation. Indeed, letting people see that there is a place and a helping-hand for them is, when all is said and done, what reconciliation is all about. So, thank goodness the IFI continues not simply to spot the challenges, but, far more important, to address them.

** Alex Kane is a former Director of Communications for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and presently a political columnist/commentator.*

CASE STUDY

Dundalk Youth Centre – Peace Impact Programme

Encouraging cross-community and cross-border relationships that built long-term trust and leadership has been a key achievement for Dundalk Youth Centre with their IFI funded Peace Impact Project.

‘Youth Diversity’ ran for three years from 2016-2019, empowering over 100 young people, operating in the North Louth and South Armagh areas. It targeted both Catholic and Protestant young people who, in many cases had not met with others from different backgrounds. It offered peace building, capacity training and developed skills and learning in cultural diversity and leadership.

The project was supported through the IFI’s Peace Impact Programme (PIP), which is designed to deliver real and positive community transformation through sensitive interventions in communities that have not previously, or have only partially, participated in peace building and reconciliation activities. The programme places particular emphasis on engaging with disaffected and marginalised young people who are vulnerable to recruitment or attack by those opposed to the Peace Process.

Kevin Moran, Manager at Dundalk Youth Centre describes their work: “Young people were not actively involved within their communities and we knew that this could have a knock on effect in later years reducing local community activity and services, so it was important to build a programme targeting them. The project primarily focussed on exploring ways young people could develop trust and relationships with other communities alongside skills development in leadership.

“Many of these young people were very segregated and unaware of other beliefs or religions. Challenges around our work included engaging the Protestant community, earning their trust and dealing with legacy issues and the past. In many cases intergenerational beliefs and trauma stemming from the conflict were being passed down and we were keen to address that.”

The legacy of The Troubles alongside rural isolation and anti-social behaviour posed major problems in these areas



but project Coordinator Mairead Hearty ensured that the project provided regular activity on a weekly basis by offering networking opportunities, study visits and community events, which were all youth led.

Throughout the course of the project Mairead recruited a team of artists and facilitators to develop a number of initiatives such as exhibitions and conferences all which worked hand in hand to develop leadership skills and strengthening relationships.

“For us it was important to keep participants engaged at each stage of the process as well as parents because they needed to see skills development first hand and the difference it was making. Keeping them involved throughout helped us break down older generations perceptions around peace building in the border regions too.”

On reflection, the project has clearly demonstrated how developing young people’s understanding and leadership skills can transform attitudes and lives in a positive, meaningful way.

Some key achievements from ‘Youth Diversity’ include two conferences- one examined young peoples’ experiences in the border regions and their visions for the future. The other was a very topical conference on Brexit where participants engaged directly with local political representatives around their views on how it would impact the border. The latter also attracted interest from the New York Times.

A A range of activities developed cross-border relationships.

B The Peer Education Programme allowed young leaders to apply skills to their own communities.

Young people have built important skills in leadership and communication supported through the Peer Education Programme, which identified and upskilled emerging young leaders from both sides of the border. Many of these young people are now able to apply valuable skills to community initiatives in their own towns and villages and some have gone on to study youth work and politics at university.

The project has helped increase peace and reconciliation in these communities and has encouraged young people to voice their own opinions, working together to create a more peaceful society for the future.

Meaningful long-term engagement with the Protestant community in South Armagh has been a personal highlight for Kevin.

“One of the first events that brought people together was in the grounds of a Church of Ireland in Crossmaglen, South Armagh. We organised a Selfie Exhibition, which celebrated the project but also used art to explore identity in more detail.

“Families from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds sat beside one another and Sinn Féin, SDLP and DUP councillors for the area attended also. I remember it clearly, in attendance that evening were two fathers – an ex-IRA prisoner and a father who was involved at a high level with the Royal Black Institution, this would never have happened before.

“Thanks to this project many generations have come together, accepting one another and keen to learn more through their kids. This gives me a great sense of pride and hope. By breaking down different perceptions, I see a stronger, more connected future for many border communities now.”

CASE STUDY

TASCIT – Peace Walls Programme

Peace Walls have stood in Northern Ireland for more than 50 years. Nearly 70% of Troubles related murders took place near Peace Walls and those living close to or beside them are more likely to have less access to education, employment and often can have higher levels of mental health and health issues.

The Fund launched its Peace Walls Programme in 2012 and aims to provide a range of confidence and relationship building initiatives that allow residents to progress towards a position where they feel safe to discuss the removal or transformation of Peace Walls in their area.

Through its support many areas have experienced improved community relations, regeneration and opportunities by breaking down these barriers, both physical and mental.

North Belfast is one area that even today still remains political and territorial – in some cases there is an inability to move beyond the past.

Rab McCallum is Project Manager at Twaddell Ardoyne Shankill Communities in Transition (TASCIT) Partnership and it has been delivering ground-breaking work since 2013.



A *The Flax Street gate in North Belfast has stood for more than 30 years.*

“Segregation, barriers and looking at how we transform them with more confidence and buy in from residents has been a key focus of our work. Up until a few years ago, there was little to no interaction between interface communities here.

“We have used various approaches to really engage residents bringing people together through sustained, engagement that lets us identify how we can enhance, build trust and address the many myths associated with both communities.

“Hosting community fun days or events like International Women’s Day or Peace Day over the years have been

successful to spark initial engagement. We are then able to assess interest and build trust to encourage local residents to talk. Through our 'Challenging Conversations' course, which lasts around 9-12 weeks, residents have that space to talk through difficult conversations, which take them out of their comfort zone. 60 people still engage with one another from this, keen to continue to work together."

“Segregation, barriers and looking at how we transform them with more confidence and buy in from residents has been a key focus of our work. Up until a few years ago, there was little to no interaction between interface communities here.”

Rab McCallum
Project Manager (TASCIT)

One of the most notable successes in recent years is the Crumlin Road interface, which saw one of the longest standing Peace Walls in North Belfast removed in 2016. This has since lead on to other projects with the NIHE and DOJ funding, including the Woodvale area, which has recently been completed. A new gate has been installed to replace old, harsh structures on Columbia Street and work is currently ongoing to open the Flax Street gate, which has been closed for 30 years.



Rab continues: "It was definitely time for change on the Crumlin Road interface area to offer a better quality of life. You'll never get 100% agreement from everyone but this work is a risk worth taking.

"We now have a strong support structure in place allowing frank and honest conversations with residents. The Crumlin Road interface has been a success but we now need to replicate this model in other interface areas to reap the real benefits for everyone.

"There are a range of other regeneration projects taking place in the area too, which would never have happened four or five years ago. New housing at Brookfield Mill for example and retail stores currently being fitted out such as LIDL and Home Bargains will be completed in due course on the Crumlin Road.

"We are working in partnership with a number of statutory agencies to advise on best practise for these projects. We've also been involved in the design process, where we consult residents on viable, costed plans for all housing and regeneration, once agreement has been reached on barrier removal. We can then bring any issues to the table, have those conversations, mediate and find some sort of path that works for both communities."

Looking ahead, North Belfast still faces a number of underlying challenges such as sectarianism, parades and anti-social behaviour at interface sites. TASCIT is keen to evolve good relations work further as well as look at social, economic development and training for those who live closest to the Peace Walls.

"Problems require attention and anything negative often has an impact in people's attitudes to Peace Walls. We are keen to sustain these relationships, see how they continue to develop and then ultimately look at how this can encourage more positive dialogue around barrier removal.

"Looking ahead long-term, if we are running out of walls, then we know it has been a success.

"It's important for us to continue to empower residents so they can learn to demonstrate local leadership. We hope to set up a new resident's forum soon, which again will promote strong, good relationships in identifying a range of shared concerns and working through them to deliver long-lasting results."

“It was definitely time for change on the Crumlin Road interface area to offer a better quality of life. You'll never get 100% agreement from everyone but this work is a risk worth taking.”

Rab McCallum
Project Manager (TASCIT)

B Transformation of a former interface on the Crumlin Road in 2016 with fencing and landscaping.

CASE STUDY

Causeway Rural & Urban Network (CRUN) – Personal Youth Development Programme

Young people in Coleraine Co. Londonderry have been given a real lifeline thanks to a unique youth project, which has brought Catholic and Protestant communities together in the town.

Causeway Rural & Urban Network's BRAKE initiative has been supported by the Fund's Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) since 2018 and it has much to reflect on as 32 participants have achieved great success in two short years.

PYDP projects support disengaged young people who are often isolated by society. They boost confidence, self-esteem and motivation through various workshops, qualifications, personal and skills development, encouraging participants to re-enter education, employment or training.

Helen Christie, Project Coordinator explains: "We were given the opportunity to create activities that fit the needs of each individual. All of our young people were unemployed for a long period of time and claiming universal credits when they joined.

"We provide weekly group sessions where participants complete a range of accredited courses aimed at developing knowledge and enhancing their CVs. One-to-one sessions help complete specific goals as well as other challenges they may be facing such as debt, housing, relationships and mental health, signposting where appropriate.

"Our approach is unlike any other youth programme as it is completely tailored to the individual. Those involved with BRAKE have complex backgrounds including; paramilitary intimidation, mental health, homelessness, substance abuse and poverty.

"A significant focus is on developing confidence and self-esteem. Team building sessions, group activities, community projects and residentials all have developed social skills and opportunities, extended social networks and helped improve support for when times are challenging.

"Those involved have been let down on numerous occasions by others and from the start we knew we needed to approach things a little differently. Setting clear boundaries was important also gives them a sense of security too. We also give them ownership on the direction of the project – they input into all training and activities that take place."



The management team have worked hard to build trust over this two-year period to ensure the project's success.

Participants have been involved in various activities and training including; accredited qualifications to enhance CVs, employability and money management. Helen and the team have worked closely with participants to identify needs and interests. This has resulted in some more unique course selections such as Positive Health and Lifestyle, workshops examining suicide awareness and an OCN in Car Valeting and Detailing.

Helen adds: "A number of participants have a keen interest in developing skills in motor vehicles but there was no course available in Northern Ireland. A local company offered to assess the course and will also provide the practical experience required to successfully complete this qualification. We hope to complete this when current covid restrictions are lifted."

Bringing all 32 participants to a better place in their lives has been a real milestone for the team. Participants now have real self-confidence ultimately making them more employable. 112

A Participants come together in weekly learning sessions.

B BRAKE is tailored to each individual and they have an input into all activities that take place.

accreditations and 41 unaccredited qualifications have been completed to date with three returning to education and five gaining employment in a variety of sectors including catering, retail and community work.

One participant who was referred via Barnardos Young Carers Service left school early and suffered from anxiety which left them rarely able to leave the house. They were also the primary carer for their mother who has both physical and mental health needs. They describe their involvement with the project:

"I was keen to get involved as it felt like life was passing me by. I learnt to cook for my family and learnt to chat to other young people as well. My confidence has grown and I now attend weekly sessions with others and I've achieved some OCN courses too. I still have some low, anxious days but I am better equipped to deal with these now and I'm looking forward to the future."

Another accomplishment has been building a strong network of support for participants from statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

"Our office is located centrally in the town which means ease of access. Community Advice Causeway located above our office provide workshops, the local Jobs and Benefits Offices work closely with us to identify opportunities and advice.

"We've also forged strong links with Mens Shed and other local charities as part of our social action element to the PYDP with



We provide weekly group sessions where participants complete a range of accredited courses aimed at developing knowledge and enhancing their CVs. One-to-one sessions help complete specific goals as well as other challenges they may be facing such as debt, housing, relationships and mental health, signposting where appropriate.



Helen Christie
Project Coordinator

some of our young team regularly volunteering.

"Moving forwards we are keen to create an apprenticeship element which could see current participants develop the skills required to become youth mentors. There is a big decline in youth workers in the area and we feel that this solution would solve a clear gap that we've identified.

"I'm really lucky to have worked with these young people, there really is nothing nicer than seeing them flourish and give back to their own community."

The Fund delivers peace and reconciliation work across the six counties of Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties as illustrated in the map.



The International Fund for Ireland is an independent international organisation established by the British and Irish Governments in 1986 with the objectives of promoting economic and social advance and of encouraging contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Unionists and Nationalists throughout Ireland. Donors to the Fund are the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

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