

Fund



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

FOCUS

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Chairman's Introduction

Following a year of uncertainty and frustration for many communities across Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties (SBC), it is easy to be downbeat about our immediate future. With the long-term impact of the pandemic still not fully realised, continued political, social and economic uncertainty and anger and public unrest due to issues of the border, and the NI Protocol we are at a crossroads in our journey for sustainable peace and reconciliation.



Whilst the challenges are clear for all to see, so too is the commitment and resilience we have witnessed from our local communities during this period, and specifically from our young people who have had many obstacles preventing them from living the lives they deserve.

This edition of Fund Focus is a chance to highlight the important role young people are playing in our communities and more importantly their resilience in the face of adversity. Living in many of the most disadvantaged and under invested areas on the island, these young people are taking courageous steps to better their lives, turning away from the lure of criminal and paramilitary activity.

Public unrest has spilled onto our streets in recent months, with many local people and communities feeling their voices are not being heard. The feeling of discontent, anger and disengagement is strong throughout these communities and it is up to organisations like the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) to provide constructive platforms to allow their voices to be heard.

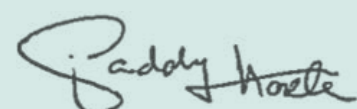
Having read some of the testimonies from projects funded via various IFI Programmes, it is clear the difference that is being made on the ground, through engagement, communication and practical help and support. You will read about the great work of Resolution North West, a project

funded through our Peace Impact Programme (PIP) who is working daily to deal with issues affecting our young people.

A Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) funded Project – IgnYte has worked hard to find innovative and creative solutions to continue to engage with young people throughout the pandemic.

These projects are working with young people who are dealing with issues including addiction, mental ill health, unemployment, and homelessness – young people who are working hard to change their lives for the better, regardless of the many barriers they face.

If we are to successfully divert future generations away from criminal and paramilitary activity, we need to provide alternative pathways. The IFI is well positioned to continue this important work but as always, we cannot do it alone. We will continue to engage with all our partners to ensure a coordinated approach to achieving a sustainable peace for local communities.



Paddy Harte, Chairman



A IFI Chairman, Paddy Harte pictured at the famous Cupar Way Peace Wall in Belfast.

Funding update

The IFI will deliver a package of a further £4,117,368 / €4,940,841 funding to support communities who are marginalised and urgently need positive intervention.

The funding has been allocated to a range of initiatives across the Peace Impact Programme (PIP), Peace Barriers Programme (PBP) and Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP). These groups face many obstacles, with some working hard to remove the influence of coercive control as well as offering alternative paths for opportunities and positive life choices.

The coronavirus pandemic has devastated communities and livelihoods. This in conjunction with problems around post Brexit measures including the NI Protocol, the Irish Sea border and growing calls for a Border Poll are all creating tension. These challenges are affecting fractured communities that have received little benefit from the Peace Process to date.

Paddy Harte, IFI Chairman says: *"We are facing a range of challenges around the long-term impact of the pandemic and the measures that have been put in place post Brexit. All of us in positions of leadership and influence across society must challenge each other to redouble our efforts to work together to find workable solutions."*

"The IFI is uniquely equipped to help communities deal with these challenges. We are enabling projects to have difficult and sensitive conversations with discontented communities who are feeling very isolated, but we are facilitating positive dialogue and encouraging alternative options for progress."

Peace Impact Programme
£1,659,585 €1,991,502

Peace Barriers Programme
£850,817 €1,020,980

Personal Youth
Development Programme
£1,606,966 €1,928,359

TOTAL FUNDING
£4,117,368
€4,940,841

"The IFI has worked tirelessly for 35 years, building relationships and giving marginalised communities hope and positive opportunities that build resilience."

The IFI's work in removing the remaining barriers to create sustainable peace is now critical. Through its programmes it encourages community development and leadership giving each generation the tools and opportunities they need to prosper and grow.

Remembering to Heal – the power of memory in healing

On January 19th when President Elect of the United States Joe Biden stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool on the night before his inauguration, he said these words to commemorate the 400,000 people who, at that point, had lost their lives in the US due to Covid-19: ***"To heal we must remember, it's hard sometimes to remember. But that's how we heal. It's important to do that as a nation. That's why we're here today. Between sundown and dusk, let us shine the lights in the darkness along the sacred pool of reflection and remember all whom we lost."***



By:
**Peter
McBride**

In speaking these words, he was connecting the healing that is required in the present with the painful memory of the events of the past. Remembering what has happened is an important part of healing – and it is painful.

In Northern Ireland, it is 23 years since the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement of 1998. Our young people have no living memory of “The Troubles” and for those of us who lived through them, the memories are receding and combining with new challenges like Covid 19. Why is it important to remember such painful times, and how is that linked to healing and reconciliation?

Whenever we live in a traumatised society, remembering is especially difficult. Trauma affects how we process exceptionally painful experiences and leaves us re-experiencing what happened rather than remembering it. For individuals this is of course deeply distressing and disruptive, but for whole communities it takes on significant additional complexity.

Traumatised communities, like many of those in Northern Ireland, have the capacity to “hold on” to the trauma to which they have been exposed. This means that people joining these communities, and those born into them, are exposed to the consequences of past traumatic events, even though they might not have been born when they happened.

“...we do a disservice to our children by burdening them with the expectation that they will sort out our mistakes.”

When our leaders enthusiastically proclaim that “the children are our future”, and that “in them we have a fresh start” – they don’t take into account the pre-loading of trauma that we burden the next generation with if we leave it untreated and unacknowledged. We now understand that through both epigenetics and social conditioning, the negative consequences of trauma are held and transmitted generation to generation. We do not start with a “clean slate” and we do a disservice to our children by burdening them with the expectation that they will sort out our mistakes. In truth, with this legacy they are more likely to repeat them! It is for these reasons that President Biden’s words become so important.

Remembering a painful past may not necessarily in itself be helpful; it can be distressing and disruptive, but with tenderness, compassion and support it can be part of a healing process. Remembering the past, or “a past” when it is not our own but our ancestor’s, allows us both to identify with it and to then distance ourselves from it. We can identify with it because

“...we must remember honestly, allowing ourselves to encounter the pain of the past without feeding the compulsion to repeat it.”

“our people” were part of that story, these were our relatives, this was our community. We can also distance ourselves from it because we can choose not to follow its example. We can choose to acknowledge and experience the pain of the past, and then choose not to repeat it in the future.

If we don’t feel some of the pain of that memory, the motivation to ensure that it is not repeated can feel abstract and empty. If we are not able to remember the painful trauma of our community histories, the trans-generational suffering we experience today remains inexplicable and without attribution, and so we act it out. It is true that what can’t be talked about or thought about – gets acted out, and so when we see violent and destructive “acting out” at a community level, we must look not just at the presenting circumstances, but at the historical trauma. For example, to explain or understand the current racial violence in the US, it is necessary to understand the trauma of slavery – with its twisted and terrible legacy. When we strike out in violence, it is motivated as much by the traumatic threat in our history behind us, as we are by the perceived threat in front of us.

What then does this mean for our young people? While it certainly means that Northern Ireland deserves the best trauma-informed mental health services available, we know that the solution is not purely a medical one. This is a whole society challenge that requires a whole society solution. It means that we need to think creatively about how we make opportunities for constructive, supportive discussion about the past, and authentic understanding of the impact these traumas have had on the present. It means we must remember honestly, allowing ourselves to encounter the pain of the past without feeding the compulsion to repeat it. With the distance of time, it means allowing ourselves not to fall into the compulsion to allocate blame, but simply to grieve the painful losses with which we live. It means moving from memory to memorialisation, where we are able to capture the truth of these past events, the pain that they have caused, and our commitment to move on and not repeat them. The creation of a meaningful and authentic narrative for our young people that pulls the past into the present and allows it to inform us in the here and now – that allows us to feel the pain of remembering – makes real the possibility of “never again”. And when asked why we should do this, why should we not just let the past rest in peace – the words of Joe Biden remind us – in order to heal we need to remember and remembering is painful.

Peter McBride is The Director of The Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies located at Keene State College, New Hampshire. He is a post conflict/atrocity mental health specialist with a wide range of skills and experience in the development of mental health and wellbeing services after community experiences of ethnically motivated violence, atrocities and genocide.

CASE STUDY

IgnYte Project, PYDP

The IgnYte Project, part of St Columb's Park Reconciliation Trust, operates out of St Columb's Park House in Londonderry/ Derry and has been funded by the IFI's Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) for almost four years.

The PYDP aims to help at risk young people develop life skills that foster good relations, build confidence and resilience and make them more employable.

Outreach has been challenging over the past year due to the coronavirus pandemic. This coupled with recent unrest in the city means there is more need than ever to extend the hand of friendship and involve young people.

Despite a challenging backdrop, there is a real sense of community, encouraging participants to leave their past behind and move towards futures with improved skills and confidence.

Michelle Simpson, IgnYte project coordinator says: "Our young people come from a range of complex backgrounds. Substance abuse, homelessness, poor mental health and susceptibility to paramilitary recruitment are just some of the issues we deal with daily.

"More than half of all paramilitary shootings in NI in recent years have happened in Derry or Strabane. Suicide rates particularly among young males and unemployment rates remain high. Many young people struggle, becoming dependent on prescription drugs and in some cases have been drawn into criminal activity."

The project has been a lifeline during lockdown continuing to deliver a range of online resources and key events with partners including Chamber of Commerce, Derry City & Strabane District Council, Visit Derry, Women in Enterprise, Red Cross and Clear Mental Health.

Michelle believes that continued support from the IFI and the project's unique approach to building resilience is key.

"Our young people have remained engaged over the last year, but we now must get to the other side of Covid. Bringing them back to face to face sessions in small Covid compliant bubbles, building trust and respecting one another is the next big step.

"The last 12 months has shattered confidence particularly in young men. I am encouraged that word is getting out about



the project, I've even had grannies ringing me asking can someone join."

The project is people centred offering a tailored plan suited to the pace of the individual.

"The core elements of the project help to give structure and regular sessions in both a group and one-to-one setting. Our initial focus is always to help improve emotional, mental, and physical health through early intervention programmes that help build self-esteem and confidence and self-worth.

"Once we've identified an individual approach and pace there are a wide number of courses available including Mentoring, Essential Skills, First Aid, Health and Safety, CSR, SIA, Good Relations and Food Safety. I have an accredited OCNNI centre so we deliver a wide range of qualifications with industry based organisations. Participants also complete an OCN in Employability which includes job searching, interview techniques, career opportunities and job matching."

When it comes to building resilience, those involved in the project know that the structure and support system gives them something to look forward to each week. Building confidence alongside skills development and mapping out everything that they can achieve has helped to transform young lives.

"It's an incredible process seeing how our young people flourish from where they have come. When you see them get their first job- it's almost like they gain a set of wings to freedom.

A Project participant, Sean Doherty, who was runner up OCNNI Learner of The Year.

B Maya Crilly who is involved with IgnYte did a work placement, pictured here with one of the Visit Derry team.

They now have the skills that make them employable alongside money management, better health and living independently.”

Thanks to IgnYte 23 participants have gained employment and one participant is self-employed. 95% of participants now achieved vocational Level 2 qualifications. Participants have engaged in a range of workshops including money management, confidence building, addressing anxiety, alcohol dependence, drug and substance abuse, suicide awareness and positive mental health. With this unique approach, 15 participants now have transitioned in to independent living after being in sheltered accommodation.

One young person was recently awarded the OCNNI Learner of the Year and this has demonstrated to others what can be achieved when there is a healthy appetite to learn and grow.

Michelle believes local community spirit has also played a significant role in helping unlock future potential.

“The key to the success of the programme is the good relationships built with a number of local businesses and organisations and visits from key note speakers from Bishops Gate Hotel, Primrose Café, Firstsource solutions and Pulse Security Management. Young people have received work placement opportunities as well as employment opportunities. We want our young people to learn to live, work and socialise together and have positive relationships with each community.

One participant describes their experience with IgnYte:

“I came to Derry from rural Donegal and had nobody. I was bed surfing and got referred to accommodation and was told about IgnYte by my support worker. To this day Michelle has never questioned me about anything, she doesn't mention the past and this is what makes the difference. I am hoping that I can volunteer in some way and they are going to get me onto a course at the local college. I know about stretching my money, living, cooking, and keeping myself clean and washing my clothes. I go to the gym and have been walking and talking during the last year. Love the garden and it's kind of relaxing when you're out working and listening to the birds and learning. I have probably learnt more over the last two years than I have done in my life. I am the new me and I love life.”

In terms of the project's future, Michelle plans to cultivate more relationships with organisations and further education providers to help young people grow through personal development, apprenticeships and employment.

She adds: “We are always looking at how we can improve our offering and we wouldn't be here without the IFI and the support of Olga and her team at Rural Action. No other funder provides what the IFI can and this all adds to the growth and transformation of each young person that we work with.”

CASE STUDY

Resolution North West, PIP

One IFI project based in the Waterside area of Londonderry / Derry is working hard to remove the negative influence of anti-social behaviour and other symbols such as flags and bonfires. Resolution North West is a newly funded project through the Peace Impact Programme (PIP). Its outreach work has used bonfires as one way to promote better understanding and build relationships between younger and older generations within the local community.



A The project worked with the local community to re-image a prominent Loyalist mural. The new mural has the support of residents and now highlights the dangers of drugs.

The IFI's PIP delivers 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. It works in areas that typically suffer from high levels of economic and social deprivation where there are low levels of engagement and where the Peace Process has delivered limited benefits.

Stephen Finlay, Project Coordinator at Resolution North West says: "We are working in an area that has suffered severely from a lack of investment, high unemployment rates and low engagement over the years. This has had a real knock on effect on younger people. Unfortunately, the lack of opportunity has created a vacuum and can often lead to anti-social behaviour."

"Drugs and alcohol abuse have increased tenfold in the area, which is concerning. Parents of secondary school children contacted the project about drugs such as spice and cocaine being readily available in the school."

Stephen's experience and passion is a testament to the good work that the project is carrying out in the area, understanding Protestant culture, and how working together can ensure that everyone benefits in the community.

"I started volunteering years ago and even then, there was anti-social behaviour linked to bonfires, parading and so on. We engaged with several partners including the local council, fire brigade and the community to put together a plan that would allow bonfires to work in a more positive way for everyone. People bought into the plan because they fundamentally weren't bothered by the bonfire but by the anti-social behaviour that went along with it."

"Bringing everyone on board from the outset, listening to concerns and finding resolutions together meant that the bonfire

went ahead without trouble. Some of the young people I worked with then, who would have been heavily involved in anti-social behaviour, now work with me to reach out to others, which is great. This successful bonfire model is now being used as the blueprint by the local council for other bonfires in the area."

The Project has three elements, which work to help build relations and understanding in the local area. Community Engagement is an important part of the project between residents, youth groups and other local organisations. Workshops and engagement around Culture and Identity look at elements of Loyalist culture including bonfires and murals. Mediation is also used to engage with harder to reach members of the community.

Engagement, especially with young people around culture and identity has had a positive impact on the community.

"Last year, we worked with young people and held a flag workshop. The purpose of this was to work towards the removal of illegal flags on bonfires. They were invited to design their own flags for the bonfire that were appropriate and in agreement with what the community wanted. This worked well and is something we plan to revisit this year."

As the band parade and marching season returns shortly, Stephen is concerned that those intent on raising tensions could use this as an opportunity to promote further unrest but not at levels witnessed in recent months.

"There is no appetite for rioting in the community, but I do recognise that events like former IRA Commander Bobby Storey's funeral has raised tensions. My main concern would be if they get involved the chances of getting a criminal record will increase significantly. And, that will damage their futures."

"We're here to show them there is an alternative to that and it isn't the path to take. We have had success in getting them into employment on building sites and in many cases, they now come to us asking if there's a possibility that they could do different courses. Getting them away from anti-social behaviour towards full time employment is a priority."

Thanks to the work of the project, a core group of 15-20 young people are actively engaged. Better relationships and trust have also been built between older members of the community and younger generations too. And, encouragingly 104 reports of anti-social behaviour around the bonfire in recent years has been reduced to five, which is a massive achievement.

"We've taught our young people that culture can be celebrated in a more inclusive way and having a sense of pride in their community is a good thing. It's important that we continue the work we have done and keep momentum growing. The next goal is to educate around the dangers of drugs."

"Young people are now approaching us to get involved and we are keen to help make them more employable and find new opportunities. The same individuals who were involved in anti-social behaviour around the bonfire before now take great pride in it. They look after the field where it is held and on occasions leading up to bonfire night have cut the grass of the neighbours who would have complained about anti-social behaviour previously. This is lovely to see and proof that what we are doing is working, long may it continue."



B The project has worked hard to ensure a community agreement is reached around the bonfire in the local area. Anti-social behaviour has been reduced significantly and young people are now taking pride in the local area.

HURT, Personal Youth Development Programme:

HURT held a final virtual celebration event for its PYDP funded 'Live to Learn' Project in March. Participants receive a variety of opportunities including personal development, upskilling, preparing for education, employment and training.

Those involved come from a range of challenging backgrounds and the HURT team shared insight around the impact of the project over the last few years. The team adapted and continued to deliver support for participants throughout the pandemic as it has been a challenging year for young people involved. Seven who began their journey in spring 2020 have now gone onto further education and employment.

A 'Live to Learn' participant takes part in some skills development and training on offer with the project.



Youth, Peace and Security Leadership Series:

A new seminar series exploring the positive role that young people can play in peace building was launched in early March.

It is a partnership between Ulster University (INCORE & TJI), The John and Pat Hume Foundation, John Hume and Thomas P. O'Neill Chair in Peace, International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and Interpeace. Every 6-8 weeks, throughout 2021 keynote speakers alongside young people's voices will be amplified via the event around the globe sharing their knowledge and experience of building and leading peace at a local level.

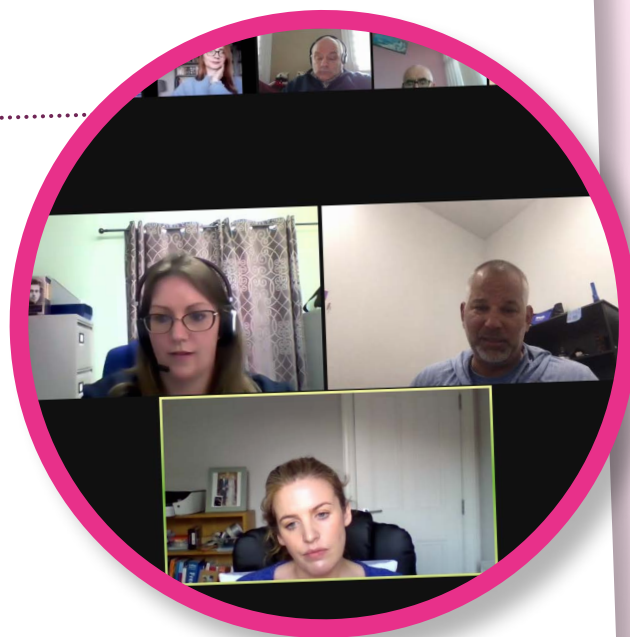
Young people are being recognised for their positive contribution to peace building through the Youth, Peace and Security Leadership Series.



AMBIT:

AMBIT is an annual capacity building programme for the IFI bringing together individuals from a range of sectors with unique experience from Northern Ireland and the southern border counties.

Participants have the chance to engage with peers, civil leaders and police officers from cities across the USA and gain knowledge that can be translated to their work locally. Due to current travel restrictions, AMBIT 2021 provided a virtual programme for 23 successful AMBIT Alumni this year. Seven virtual sessions were delivered with a range of topics. Leaders in community development and peace reflected on their experiences of the past 12 months, how they adapted and what long-term implications the pandemic may have on work and communities going forward. This included a range of Q & A sessions with the IFI Chair Paddy Harte, organisations from Detroit, New York, Washington DC and peace activists from Israel /Palestine. The virtual programme was received well and there are plans to run similar sessions later in the summer.



An online session being delivered with guest speakers and participants through the AMBIT programme this year.

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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