

Integrating Community Organisations

An Evaluation for the Rural Development Council

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1. Introduction

The Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) was commissioned by the Rural Development Council (RDC) in August 2012 on behalf of the International Fund for Ireland to conduct an evaluation of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme which the Fund had developed and supported as part of its *Sharing this Space* strategy which was launched in January 2006.

1.1 International Fund for Ireland (the Fund)

The *Integrating Community Organisations* programme was predicated on relationship building within and between communities being critical in the long term imbedding of the peace process and it may be one of the final programmes which the Fund will support in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties. The origins of Fund support for the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme stem from a desire on behalf of the Fund to promote genuine sharing (rather than the 'sharing out') of resources and encourage more sustainable partnership working between community organisations across the religious divide. This is particularly important in the current economic climate whereby the budgets for community relations and peace-building work are much reduced from where they were before the economic downturn.

Additionally, given the segregated nature of much of Northern Ireland, very often community based organisations find themselves operating in a single identity context with little opportunity for interaction or engaging with their counterparts across the divide. The Fund believed that it was important to challenge this lack of joined up working. The Fund also felt that it was important to build the skills and capacity of organisational committees and volunteers to increase their ability to work alongside one another. It was also considered to be important that community based organisations could work together to identify local issues and devise locally based programmes to improve community relations. Indeed, this longer-term approach to building skills and partnerships which move beyond 'tokenism', and which will last beyond the end of funding deadlines, was a core rationale behind the development of the programme.

1.2 Rural Development Council (RDC)

The RDC was established in 1991 as part of the UK government's Rural Development Initiative. The organisation is a council of rural stakeholders which aims to promote regeneration and positive change in rural areas. RDC's strategic framework, which was published in 2007, highlighted that the organisation would increasingly focus on:

- Developing objective analysis;
- Delivering practical actions and solutions; and
- Sharing best practice.

RDC has acted on behalf of the International Fund in delivering many initiatives in both rural and urban communities, including Belfast and in the southern border counties for several years. It has also acted as an agent of DARD and the Special EU Programmes Body.

1.3 Integrating Community Organisations

In 2007 the Fund and RDC developed an innovative process that would make the Sharing This Space aspiration to integrate community organisations a reality. The Fund approved an initial round which began in early 2008 and ran until mid 2010 with financial support of £450,724. An evaluation of that phase was conducted by Greenhat Consulting, this document is focused on the impacts of the current support phase of the *Integrating Community Organisations* Programme which the Fund provided financial support of £535,846.

Ultimately, the programme had four key aims. These were to:

- Increase the capacity and confidence of unionist and nationalist communities to work together;
- Foster and develop relationships within and between communities;
- Be a catalyst for groups to engage in partnership and take decisive action towards new and innovative projects to benefit their communities; and
- Encourage sustainable partnership working and promote continued reconciliation and peace building activities.

Essentially partnership was at the core of the programme. A community based organisation could apply either as a single applicant or with a partner organisation from the 'Other' community. If an organisation had no partner to apply with, RDC worked to match them with a suitable from the 'Other' community that they felt would be suitable. Appendix 1 provides a list of applicants and subsequent partnerships involved in the programme. Sustainability was crucial to the programme, with the hope being that the partnerships developed as a result of the programme will be maintained and further developed now the programme has ended and funding is gone.

Applications were open to community based organisations in rural *and* urban areas in Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Monaghan, Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth and Sligo. Umbrella or networked organisations were not eligible to apply, and priority tended to be given to groups who had no prior contact with the Fund.

There were two core phases to programme activities. The first phase involved access to a variety of different forms of training, mentoring and support. The ultimate goal of this initial support phase in bringing the two community organisations together was for them to move on to apply for a small joint learning project, with up to £5,000 allocated for the delivery of a series of activities. The support phase was therefore focused on preparing the groups to be able to work in partnership as many groups had not previously worked either with one another, or indeed, even on a cross-community basis. To begin the support process, RDC staff worked with each group to establish a baseline of their skills and

capacity before developing an action plan to take them forward. The action plan focused on three key areas; group capacity, partnership working and good relations.

One issue central to the development of the programme was flexibility in terms of the training and support given that different groups have different capacities and needs. Some groups applying were organisational committees made up entirely of volunteers with no experience of receiving funding of this nature before. Other organisations had paid and experienced employees in place to deliver project activities. These individuals tended to be more used to the rigours of the application process and drawing down funding.

In the first phase some well established groups were able to proceed directly to the project phase without good relations training. It was decided however that as improving good relations was a key driver behind the programme, all groups in the second phase had to take part in good relations workshops. This meant that groups had to engage with sensitive issues with one another and could no longer suggest that they 'had no issues in their area' with sectarianism and 'did not need' good relations training.

In addition, and based upon the findings of the evaluation of the first phase, it was also decided that any future programmes should seek to try and partner community organisations who were based closer together. It was believed that this would be a more sustainable approach to promoting relationships which may last above and beyond the lifespan of the project.

Forty two community based organisations have participated in the support strand since 2011, with 20 small projects developed based on this partnership approach. Small projects varied between story telling for the purposes of trauma recovery, fun-runs to bring individuals and communities together, music and dance workshops and environmental improvement projects with a good relations and relationship building component.

Strand two seeks to build on this process of training and mentoring and provide financial support to those groups who wish to take their partnership to the next level and apply for funding for a larger and more ambitious project (a maximum amount of £100,000 could be applied for). In total 15 partnerships have proceeded to this larger project strand which will end in December 2013. Not all partnerships have decided to proceed to the larger project for a variety of reasons which this evaluation will document further. This evaluation is based upon the process to date, and therefore focuses on the support and small project strand.

1.3 Methodology

ICR staff, in partnership with RDC, decided that the most appropriate method to evaluate a programme which was essentially based upon improving relationships, would be through qualitative discussions with the project participants. ICR staff also reviewed relevant documentation including project applications and progress reports which also allowed us to better assess whether or not the outcomes of small projects had matched organisation's stated aims and objectives in their application.

In total 23 individuals were spoken to directly as part of the evaluation process. This included 17 individuals from participating groups, five members of RDC, and one IFI staff

member. A number of participating groups were identified as ‘case study’ organisations and are included in Appendix 2.

This ‘case study’ information involved more detailed paperwork, as well as in most instances asking individual’s permission to digitally record their interviews. The purpose of this was to enable the use of direct quotations from the participants themselves to enrich the research material. We sought to include a geographic mix of groups perceived to have progressed well alongside those who had encountered some difficulties. As part of the evaluation process, ICR staff attended the programme residential in Monaghan on 23rd November at which all participating groups provided further information on their joint projects, the perceived benefits of the programme, alongside the challenges they had encountered during the process.

2. Key Findings

The following section of the report documents a number of the key findings with regards to participants’ views on the programme.

2.1 Role of RDC

There were two key elements to the programme which were absolutely crucial to the development of relationships between individuals and community organisations (which will be further addressed in point 2.2). The first was the approach of RDC staff while the second was the flexibility and structure of the programme itself.

A common theme running throughout the interviews with project participants was that the approach of RDC staff in working alongside them over a sustained period of time built their confidence in the process of engagement before they were ready to take part in cross-community work. Often, this was a slow process which took many months, various meetings and support and mentoring work to build the skills and capacity of individuals to talk about sensitive issues for the first time. Very often individuals had not been involved in discussions on community relations issues before even within their own community setting, and a number had not engaged directly with members of the ‘Other’ community. A number of participants spoke of their reticence in even initially discussing sensitive issues amongst members of their own organisation for fear of what their colleagues might say. It was in this regard that the experience, support and mentoring provided by RDC staff was felt to have been invaluable:

“I have to say that the staff (RDC) have been fantastic...This was all so new to us, but they really took their time, were patient with us, and brought us out the other side”
(Male, Protestant).

In this regard, the time spent by RDC staff working in communities to build trust and relationships was facilitated by the structure of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme. At different times this involved staff working in difficult and sensitive political circumstances.

Various different programmes over the years have involved a funding body, a delivery agent and programme participants. However, what differentiates the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme from other good relations programmes is that the Rural Development Council was central to the programme and provided significant extra value to the impacts of the programme.

While RDC staff did handle the financial and administrative aspects of the programme, their crucial role was in the support given to communities to build their capacity to engage with one another. Without this structure the programme would have merely involved administering amounts of monies to community organisations for various projects which is quite often how good relations programmes are administered. This was most certainly *not* the case with the *Integrating Community Organisations* Programme.

It was also crucial that the sustained period of support provided by RDC staff allowed the groups themselves to design and develop good relations programmes which addressed local needs, rather than having projects ‘imposed’ on them from above. This organic approach to project development was also a crucial element of the success of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme and suggests that the method of having a delivery agent who supports and engages with participants over a long period of time appears to be a successful way to better promote partnership working on a cross-community and a cross-border basis.

2.2 Relationship development

One of the most significant impacts of the programme was the development of relationships between individuals and organisational committees on a cross-community basis.

Even in those instances where partnerships in close geographic proximity to one another applied together to the programme, there was little history of collaborative working, or in many cases, even contact between the respective organisational committees prior to getting involved in *Integrating Community Organisations* activities. The programme consolidated these relationships and helped them get to know their colleagues better.

According to a number of participants, key to developing relationships between organisations was the long lead-in period (approximately 12 months) and work alongside RDC staff during the support strand. During this strand initial contact between groups was facilitated by RDC staff. These initial efforts involved meetings with ice-breakers and guided tours to one another’s areas in an effort to develop some personal familiarity before beginning to deal with some of the deeper issues. In some instances applicant groups had never participated in a cross-community programme before and applied to RDC as a single applicant and were subsequently partnered on a cross-community basis.

In rural areas impacted upon by the ‘Troubles’ and with little history of cross-community contact, there was a reticence amongst some participants about what to expect from the process:

“...coming from an LOL background we didn’t know if there would be many who would want to take us on ...but there was a group in close proximity and we decided that we would make a very tender approach to them to see if they would be interested in forming a partnership ...neither group was total strangers to each other, but we had our own clear identity and were living apart up until that stage...the hall is on the A5 stretch, 13 murders on that stretch of road during the ‘Troubles’. The two communities were living pretty harmoniously, but we would never have stepped across the line” (Male, Protestant).

For a number of participants, the building of relationships between community leaders was an important component to building a more sustainable peace at the grass-roots. Several interviewees talked about their participation in other good relations programmes which ‘tried to run before they could walk’. In other words, programmes which instantly attempted to have a wider impact within communities without necessarily building relationships between leaders in the two communities first:

“One of the strengths of this programme was that relationships were built between the leaders at the start. Sometimes things are built from the bottom and the leaders aren’t developed, so there’s no sustainability” (Female, Catholic).

2.3 Changing the conversations and perceptions

Building relationships between participating groups and their members was a key impact of the programme, this further allowed for the natural development of deeper and more meaningful conversations amongst participants on good relations issues, and in particular the legacy of the ‘Troubles’. On various occasions interviewees spoke about all the things in their area that remained ‘unsaid’, and that there was a ‘politeness’ and avoidance of any issues which may be contentious or which may be seen as possibly offending someone from the ‘Other’ community.

Essentially, the facilitation of sensitive discussions by RDC staff and outside trainers for a number of groups allowed for a degree of self-reflection on previously held views and attitudes towards the ‘Other’ community. Various interviewees referred to involvement in the programme challenging some of their previously held views:

“We learned from different perspectives...there was one participant who thought she was very liberal in her views and thinking but after completing the course realised she has changed her way of thinking. We were able to think outside the box, the course was very subtle, it enabled us to see it’s not just black and white, there are many shades of grey in between.” (Female, Protestant).

“We thought we knew what everyone thought about us, but we didn’t know it all...we had to learn a lot from each other...We feel from there on really the door has been opened to us with the other community. When we meet now we can stand and have a chat. Personally I don’t feel as on tenterhooks about everything” (Female, Catholic).

At times various participants used specific examples to highlight how they felt their perceptions had changed, or at the very least, been challenged by their involvement in the programme:

“...when it came to the Orange Order, my own ignorance...I drove past the Orange Hall hundreds of times and I never was in it. And I have learnt an awful lot since that and so has the rest of the community ...having had the history explained to me I had faith they too were on a journey of progression because I still viewed them as where I had known them, not on where they are or where they are going. I can say that through the course I have an increased appreciation and less reticence of embracing other cultures. I feel empowered now to move on with things, however that might take me...It’s a whole lot better than when I started. And this is only the start of my journey” (Female, Catholic).

However as one of the above participants highlighted, many individuals felt that the small project activities, and in particular the good relations discussions facilitated by RDC staff had only started their own personal journeys in terms of learning more about the ‘Other’ community. This is where it was felt that further engagement in the larger programme and the sustained period of working with RDC will help promote more lasting changes in the nature of relationships between participants:

“All in all it may be tiny footsteps, but hopefully in the future we may be able to run in the marathon.” (Male, Protestant).

“We do feel we can facilitate change, if it can happen to us, why not to the wider community? That’s why we wanted to do the larger project” (Female, Catholic).

Indeed, this latter point of broadening out the impact of the programme into the wider community is certainly a challenge which many groups hoped to address by participating in the larger project.

2.4 Building skills and capacity

RDC was well positioned to assist those groups which required most help due to a lack of experience or low capacity in terms of community development. A significant impact of the programme was that in a partnership where one partner group had less experience, RDC staff deliberately partnered them with a more experienced group. For example, while CoolNew Opportunities had little experience in cross-community engagement, they were able to learn from their colleagues in VOICES who had more previous experience in the area about the potential benefits and challenges of such work (See Case Study 3, Appendix 2). The CoolNew and VOICES partnership have also included community development training as part of their larger project to improve the skills of the women. Similarly, organisations such as Glennfinn Area Council which had little or no previous experience of engaging with young people learnt from the experiences of both the Castlederg Youth Forum and the Young Loyalist Flute Band who work with young people on a regular basis (See Case Study 1, Appendix 2).

If desired, organisations could also build their programmes around specific training which they felt was required which was a positive example of the flexibility in the structure of the programme.

2.5 Improved Mobility

RDC encouraged individuals from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds to travel to areas which they previously would have avoided due to fears for their personal safety. The partnership between REACT in Armagh and the Doohamlet District Development Association in County Monaghan is an example of the impact of the programme on encouraging participants to visit areas they had previously avoided (See Case Study 5, Appendix 2). Programme activities appeared to help begin to challenge the ‘mental maps’ of ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ spaces developed during the course of the ‘Troubles’ for a number of participants.

2.6 Sustainability

One of the main precepts behind the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme is that it should promote the building of genuine, lasting and sustainable partnerships between groups. In other words, partnerships that will continue to work together long after the programme has finished and funding in this instance has gone. The attempt to pair up organisations based closer to one another geographically was also part of this process of trying to build more sustainable partnerships. It should however be noted that some of the longer distance partnerships have also been very successful.

The majority of those individuals spoken to as part of this evaluation process very much saw their relationship with their partner organisation continuing after the programme. At various times participants talked about plans they had for other potential pieces of work they could get involved in alongside their partner organisation:

“...everyone is asking, where do we go now? What’s next? We have lots of ideas. We are working well together” (Male, Protestant).

While it is difficult for this evaluation to assess whether the current partnerships will indeed last the course beyond the lifespan of the programme, there are two positive examples of the sustainability of partnerships which developed during the earlier phase of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme. These are the ongoing partnerships between Carntogher/Kilcronaghan and Riverstown/Brookeborough.

Based near Maghera, Carntogher is a small, predominantly Catholic village while Kilcronaghan is a predominantly Protestant village situated just eight miles away. While there had been limited contact between some committee members prior to joining the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme, there was very limited interaction between members of both communities. Building their project around issues of common concern, the focus was on environmental improvements with a good relations component. As a result the partnership facilitated by RDC staff encouraged locals to visit one another’s village by attending arts, music and social events in church halls and other venues which were unfamiliar to them.

As a result of their partnership, a heritage trail with a website and an 'app' for I-Phones and Smart-phones has been developed to better connect both villages and promote the local area as a tourist region. Indeed, there are plans for both organisations to continue their partnership long after the funding is gone by working together to develop future programmes. An additional benefit was the role of both groups in working alongside another two local organisations, the Maghera Parish Caring Association and a local Irish medium primary school to include them in good relations activities which broadened out the partnership into the other neighbouring communities.

Similarly, the partnership developed between Riverstown Enterprise Development in County Sligo and Brookeborough and District Community Development Association in County Fermanagh (the Riverbrooke Initiative) is another example of a partnership which looks like it may sustain itself longer-term. This partnership successfully engaged around themes including good relations discussions, youth issues, primary schools and cultural awareness raising. As an off-shoot of the programme, a cross-community youth club was established in 2012 in Brookeborough in a Controlled school with parental consent. The partnership has since handed over responsibility for the youth club to local residents in the hope that it will continue on into the foreseeable future, beyond the timescale of the programme. Additionally, the ongoing work of the partnership in engaging with primary schools and churches around good relations and cultural diversity issues has opened up schools and churches to the 'Other' community for the first time in most instances in each area, and representatives of the partnership hoped that this work would continue on into the future. One challenge which will however face the partnership is the fact that both organisations are 70 miles apart.

Both of these partnership endeavours indicate that potentially, successful partnerships can sustain themselves. Perhaps the most definitive example of RDC staff helping to promote longer-term and sustainable partnership working through the current phase of the programme has been the example of the partnership which has developed between Ophir Rugby Football Club and St. Enda's Gaelic Athletic Club in the wider Glengormley area (See Case Study 6, Appendix 2).

2.7 Challenges

Although the evaluation to date has focused on some of the key impacts of the programme, it would be disingenuous to suggest that there were not various challenges and difficulties encountered by different groups at different stages.

Challenges tended to be either **operational** and related to the structure or delivery of the programme, related to **wider political conditions** above and beyond the parameters of the programme or to the **uncertainty surrounding the funding** of similar programmes given that the International Fund and Atlantic Philanthropies may be set to leave the stage.

Operational/Structural issues

Essentially, there would appear to be four main challenges which were faced in terms of the operational delivery of the programme. Not all groups were impacted upon by these issues, and most groups did not encounter all four simultaneously, but nevertheless they did come up in conversations with some participants.

The **first** reported issue for some participating groups with lower levels of capacity was the financial and administrative aspects of the programme, whereby quotes had to be secured for services provided as part of the small project phase. Organisations with paid employees with experience of being involved in other funding streams tended to feel that the process of drawing down funds was relatively straightforward. However those individuals with less experience, and particularly those who tended to be engaging in a voluntary capacity rather than as paid workers, appeared to have greater difficulties with managing the financial and administrative aspects of the programme. This meant that some organisations required much greater levels of administrative support from RDC staff to complete paperwork which was a labour intensive process for all parties involved. It is important that funders take account of the capacity of grant recipients, particularly those that rely exclusively on volunteers.

A **second**, and more significant challenge in terms of the programme structure, relates to the timescales required in terms of progressing partnership work. Given that funding had to be spent by particular dates (through no fault of the International Fund but related to deadlines imposed by its donors) there was an inevitable pressure on groups (and RDC) at various times to complete project activities. As a result some groups at various stages felt that the time was 'not yet ready' for activities to happen, and this is one reason why not all groups proceeded to the larger project phase. They felt that their partnership needed more time to be consolidated rather than 'rushing in' to future work immediately after the small project phase had been completed. As one RDC member of staff commented:

"If you are working with a single group and building their capacity to implement a single project, that's fine, you can move that on fairly fast. When you are building a partnership up from scratch, it takes time and you can't rush people... ideally you need more time if you are working in partnership, to do support work, build capacity and fully engage in partnership working".

Several interviewees referred to the fact that engaging in cross-community work was a relatively new experience for their organisation, and that it takes time to build trust between communities. While understandably the project had various milestones which had to be met within a specific timeframe, undoubtedly such restrictions may not be the most useful means of promoting longer-term and more sustainable cross-community partnerships.

The **third** challenge relating to the delivery of the project is in relation to the networking opportunities provided by the residentials organised as part of the programme. While

there was general consensus amongst interviewees that the residential provided an opportunity to meet, interact and learn from others, some felt that some of the residential involving all of the participating groups were 'too packed' with activities which provided less time and space to talk with other organisations about their experiences as part of the programme.

Another issue for some groups relates to the broad range of projects which have been developed as part of the programme. Although in many ways this is undoubtedly a strength, it also makes it more difficult to succinctly distil key learning for participants which can be applied across all projects and in all contexts.

A **fourth**, and again a more significant challenge, relates to the numbers of organisations in a partnership and their geographic location. Those organisations in a three-way partnership logistically found it more difficult to set up meetings with one another given other commitments and busy schedules. However more importantly those organisations who had to travel further to meet their partner organisation found it more challenging than those based in closer proximity to one another.

Wider political conditions

There are a number of challenges to the sustainability of partnerships which are outside of the direct influence of the programme, RDC or the Fund. A particular issue relates to wider levels of community participation. Some organisations struggle to involve larger numbers of their community, and at times one or two individuals tended to be left with all the work to do.

An even more challenging issue for the sustainability of future partnerships relates to the wider political climate. Several participants referred to some levels of disquiet or more active opposition to the cross-community work they were doing in the local area. One partnership was unable to proceed to the project phase due to wider political challenges in an area as they felt that it would not be safe to work together. This was an instance whereby one organisation was more ready to engage on a cross-community basis than another. A participant commented:

“There was, and is, hardline people in both areas who aren’t necessarily against what we were doing, but were keeping a close eye. And there were a few members on our committee who have now left our committee because I have joined (A Catholic joining a predominantly Protestant group)...there is a hardline element in both areas, one person brought her kids to the Orange Hall but would not let her kids in the GAA hall. The kids were all ready to go and wanted to go, but she wouldn’t let them go” (Male, Catholic).

In the context of the protests in various areas across Northern Ireland sparked off by the flag dispute at Belfast City Hall, it is possible that wider political circumstances at various times may mitigate against specific partnerships progressing as otherwise may be expected. It is worth bearing in mind that these challenges can impact upon what work is

possible, and groups in such difficult situations will require outside support to work through these issues.

Funding

Another potential issue which may impact upon the work that can be developed in the future relates to the nature and amount of funding available. While 'PEACE 4' monies would appear to be the most obvious source of potential funding for future programmes of this nature, there still remains uncertainty over whether or not such a funding programme will be established and if so whether it will be able to encompass this type of investment. Potential other sources of funding for future programmes would be local authorities good relations grants, although these pots of money tend to be relatively small.

Perhaps one area where funding could, and should, be sought is from the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMdfM). The aims of programmes such as *Integrating Community Organisations* fit within priority four of the Programme for Government (2011-2015) which refers to 'building relationships between communities' and promoting 'collaborative working' (OFMdfM 2011). Clearly therefore building sustainable relationships and partnerships between organisations and communities is a priority policy area for OFMdfM. RDC and the Fund should explore with OFMdfM the potential for funding future programmes in this regard whether it is through transforming contested space, regeneration, good relations issues, or capacity building through developing sustainable partnerships.

EU Rural Development funding may be available under the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (2007-2013). The rural white paper published in July 2012, referred to key areas of interest for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) being 'access to services', 'promoting tolerance', 'community safety', developing 'shared future housing', and 'promoting and encouraging applications from rural areas for the *Contested Spaces* programme'. In this regard it may be useful for exploratory discussions to be held with DARD to assess what funding could be made available to promote partnership working and good relations activities in a rural context.

Summary

Clearly the programme has had a number of positive impacts on participating individuals and organisations. In particular the main benefits identified to date have been the building of relationships between individuals and organisations, the transforming of conversations to engage directly with sensitive issues, the challenging of perceptions of the 'Other' community, the building of the skills and capacity of participants and organisations and finally the development of a number of sustainable partnerships which hopefully will continue to work together long after this specific programme has ended.

A key aspect of the programme was the role of RDC in mentoring and supporting community organisations to build their skills, capacity and readiness to engage in sustainable partnership working. In this regards the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme is different from other funding streams through which the delivery agent only provide administrative and financial assistance. In contrast, RDC staff were crucial to the development and delivery of the partnership working which was the core component of the programme.

The evaluation has also however identified a small number of challenges relating to the operational delivery and structure of project activities as well as wider political challenges which are beyond the control of project participants, RDC and the Fund.

3. Discussion and Recommendations

One of the overall strengths of the programme has been its use of an open and flexible framework to support innovative attempts to promote good relations which has resulted in groups developing a range of activities. A key success was that RDC staff worked alongside community organisations to develop project activities. Whether it be through encouraging young Catholics and Protestants north or south of the border to come together through the arts, challenging sectarianism through promoting good relations in sporting activities, or bringing together small groups to discuss the impact of the 'Troubles' on their daily lives, different groups have differing projects which best fit their own local needs to address issues relating to the legacy of the conflict. The fact that RDC staff were able to work closely with organisational committees over a long period of time was also crucial to the success of the programme. Without this supportive approach, relationships between partnered organisations would not have developed as they did.

However, the broad range of very differing programme activities means it is also difficult to apply a 'one size fits all' approach to quantify the outputs of each project given that aims and objectives, while based generically on good relations, were very specific to each project. It is also very difficult to 'measure' verifiably whether when the Ophir and St. Enda's partnership say they aim to reduce sectarianism in Glengormley, or the Castlederg partnership aim to reduce parade related disturbances, that both partnerships have actually contributed to a reduction in incidents. Once finished, both the Ophir/St. Enda's and Castlederg/Donegal partnerships may have helped improve community relations and reduce sectarian incidents in both locations; however, trying to directly measure this process is at best speculative and at worst overly reductionist as it would be extremely hard to independently verify such claims. Similarly, should sectarianism in both locations increase after the programme, it would be equally foolhardy to try and apportion direct blame to both partnerships for 'not working' rather than the wider political situation more generally.

It is for these reasons that we must talk about the impacts of the programme that we could 'measure', in terms of their impact on participants directly. This evaluation has identified seven direct and key impacts of the programme. These are:

- **The development of an innovative mentoring methodology.** Mentoring support on an ongoing basis by RDC was crucial to building relationships and establishing the partnerships from which project activities were subsequently developed. This mentoring role should be borne in mind when considering devising future programmes;
- the **building of relationships** between individuals and organisational committees (20 small projects completed on a cross-community and/or a cross-border basis);
- the **transforming of conversations** to engage directly with sensitive issues;
- the **challenging of perceptions** of the 'Other' community;
- the **building of the skills** and capacity of participants and organisations;
- the **building of confidence to travel** to geographic areas previously perceived to be 'off-limits'; and
- the **development of a number of potentially sustainable cross-community and cross-border partnerships** (15 partnerships in total from the current programme have proceeded to the larger project phase).

These seven key developments are broadly in line with the aims of the programme.

In the main, the impact of the programme to date has focused more directly on participants rather than filtering out widely in to communities. Although there have been some examples of wider community engagement, this has tended to have been a one-off attendance at a cross-community fun-day or an event rather than any more in-depth engagement. It is hoped that through the larger project strand a 'ripple effect' can be achieved in terms of further engaging local communities on more in-depth issues. It may be useful therefore for RDC and the Fund to consider conducting a review of current projects and partnerships further down the line to assess the actual impact of the programme once all activities have finished. Such a review would also provide an opportunity to assess whether or not those partnerships which believed they would continue to work together did indeed continue to do so.

Building on the findings of the evaluation of the first programme, this report has found that partnerships appear to be most sustainable where:

- Organisations are based in close proximity to one another;
- Organisations have similar aims and objectives and wish to focus on similar themes to promote improved relationships between communities (e.g. economics, sport, music and arts etc);
- There is backing in the community for cross-community work and wider political circumstances allow for partnerships to grow;

It should be noted that encouraging partnership working in a relatively close geographical area is crucial if the programme is to encourage relationship building to promote *sustainable* improved community relations. The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland are such that relationships, even on a Protestant/Catholic basis, are contextual and tend to also be linked to territory. If the ultimate aim is to improve community relations, reduce sectarianism and contribute to a more sustainable peace on the ground, then work should be encouraged most where relationships are being built between groups who are based in a similar geographical area.

The support element of the programme has focused on these area based partnerships and should be commended for doing so. Local partnerships are also more likely to have more direct impacts on relations in a specific area rather than simply relating to more abstract thoughts on members of the 'Other' community who 'live a long way away'. Once back in segregated communities, it is easy for the 'tribal' mentality to re-emerge if it is not your direct neighbours you have been engaging with. Perhaps more mundanely, the approach of supporting groups located nearby to one another is also likely to be more conducive to sustainable partnership working in the longer-term given the logistics of travel.

The support element of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme has undoubtedly had a number of positive impacts for participating individuals and organisations. While the community organisations themselves should be commended for their progress, RDC as a delivery agent has been crucial to the success of the programme in terms of working closely with groups to build their capacity to engage in cross-community and cross-border partnerships. Many organisations engaged in the programme had not previously discussed good relations issues or been involved in cross-community/cross-border work, and the sustained period of time that RDC staff worked alongside organisations in the support phase allowed for trust to be built and relationships to develop.

The following are a number of recommendations which aim to assist in the development and delivery of similar programmes in the future.

1. **Consideration should be given to the timescales required to promote partnership working.** The specific approach of the programme in 'nurturing' partnerships between community organisations on a cross-community basis was very successful. However, this process can take time. Funding requirements at times mean that groups are required to move more quickly than they are perhaps ready for which should be considered by funding bodies in any future programmes;
2. **Priority should be given to supporting partnerships which are based in a similar location and have similar aims and objectives to one another.** This is likely to promote more sustainable working in the medium to longer-term and deals with sensitive issues in their local context;

3. **A future review should be conducted of the overall impact of the programme, including the larger project phase.** This review would also be in a position to assess whether or not the partnerships formed have indeed lasted beyond the lifespan of the project;
4. Funding organisations need to allocate **adequate timing and planning in to the scheduling of future evaluations.** If quantitative evidence is felt to be more appropriate for measuring project outcomes, the strategy for evaluation needs to be put in place before a project begins;
5. **RDC and the Fund should make plans for an ‘exit strategy’ in terms of this project.** In particular, RDC and the Fund should consider how they can best support those projects operating in a difficult environment. This may involve providing further information and signposting to other organisations and potential funding bodies who may be able to provide advice and resources.

Appendix 1

The table below documents the participating organisations in the programme, the nature of the partnership and the type of project delivered.

Table 1: Applicants and Partnerships (2011-)

Lead Partner	Joint partner(s)	Applied as partnership or single applicant	Support Phase completed	Small Project	Larger Project
An Mhachaire Le Cheile Teo	East Donegal Ulster Scots Group	Single	Yes	Yes	Yes
Annaclone Community Engagement Group	Kinallen Rural Community Development Association	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Articlave Community Development Group	Castle Community Association	Single	Yes	No	No
Belfast South Community Resources	Short Strand Community Forum	Single	Yes	Yes	Yes
Castledearg Youth Forum, Castledearg	Gleann Fhinne Teoranta and Castledearg Young Loyalists Flute Band	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chanterhill Community Association	Cavanaleck Community Association	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cloughmills Community Action Team	Cloughmills Cultural & Historical Society	Single	Yes	Yes	Yes
Garrison Community Sporting & Social Club,	Garrison Church of Ireland group	Single	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greenore Greencastle Community Association, Greenore	Kilkeel Development Association	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Margaret of New Orleans Heritage Group	Breedagh Old School House Committee.	Single	Yes	Yes	No
New Mossley Community Group	Forthspring Inter Community	Partnership/Single	Yes	Yes	No

	Group				
Newtowncunningham Interchurch Committee	First Presbyterian Church, Derry, St. Eugenes and Long Tower Parish	Single	Yes	Yes	No
Newtownsaville LOL 646	Ballygawley Roscavey Rural Bygones.	Single	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ophir Rugby Football club	St Endas GAC, Glengormley	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
REACT	Doohamlet District Development Association	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shankhill Junior Football Club, Belfast	Ardoyne Youth Club	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shankill Parish Caring Association	Springwell Centre	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stewartstown Community Group	Cookstown North Group	Single	Yes	Yes	No
The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland	Dundalk Railway Group	Partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Voices Women's Group	Coolenew Opportunities	Single	Yes	Yes	Yes
Articlave Community Development Group	Castle Community Association	Single	Yes	No	No
Ballymote Community Enterprise Ltd	N/A	Single	Withdrew	N/A	N/A
PLACE Initiative	Drumcree Community Trust	Partnership	Withdrew	N/A	N/A
Richhill School of Music	N/A	Single	Withdrew	N/A	N/A
Seaview Enterprises	Newington Football Club	Partnership	Withdrew	N/A	N/A

Appendix 2

Case study One - Castledearg Youth Forum, Gleann Fhinne Teoranta & Castledearg Young Loyalists Flute Band

This partnership involved an initial two way application from the Youth Forum and Gleann Fhinne, with the Young Loyalists Flute Band coming on board after behind the scenes negotiations in 2011. Both the youth forum and the band are based in the rural town of Castledearg in the north-west, a place which was significantly impacted upon by the 'Troubles'. The area is still highly segregated with a predominantly Catholic 'top' end of the town and predominantly Protestant 'bottom' end, and the town still has regular disputes over parades and political symbolism and sporadic outbreaks of sectarian violence.

The Castledearg Youth Forum is a mixed group containing young Catholics and Protestants, while the Young Loyalists Flute Band is all-Protestant and has been a feature of the town since the mid-1970s. The Youth Forum had been involved in tentative discussions since 2010 with the band about engaging in cross-community work, but it was felt that the 'time was not right' for any work to proceed. The band has little experience of cross-community work, although Catholic journalist Darach McDonald did spend a year following the band as the basis for his recently published book, '*Blood and Thunder: Inside an Ulster Protestant Band*'.

Gleann Fhinne Teoranta, or Glennfinn Area Council, is based near Ballybofey in County Donegal 20 miles away from Castledearg. The council is approximately two-thirds Catholic and one-third Protestant. According to representatives of the organisation, there is little interaction between the majority Catholic and minority Protestant population in this part of Donegal, and in particular there were few opportunities for young people to meet across the divide:

I didn't realise there was a split between Protestants and Catholics down there over the border... but Catholics went to Catholic school, Protestants went to Protestant school, there's an 80/20 mix (Catholic/Protestant), everyone gets on fine but there is not much interaction or anything like that, they have their own social gatherings...I looked at ways of bringing the youth together as it was all focused on the elderly (Female, Catholic).

As such it was decided that the organisation could learn from the experience of the Castledearg Youth Forum and a cross-community, cross-border project was devised to attempt to bring young people together. The initial focus was on nine music and nine dance workshops which it was felt would be enjoyable ways for the young people from all three organisations to be brought together and interact before engaging in deeper good relations learning. Subsequently the young people took part in six good relations workshops to talk about equality, flags and emblems, parades, sectarianism, human rights, and stereotyping/labelling. The workshops were held in all three locations and allowed young people and group leaders the opportunity to visit areas they had never been to before. For many members of the band, they had never crossed the border to visit the Republic of Ireland, and this in and of itself was a significant step.

In terms of building relationships, representatives of all three participating groups felt that both the young participants and the adult leaders had benefitted from their involvement in the programme, although work was still needed to continue to build relationships moving forwards:

Like even simple things, the visits through the RDC programme, (name) invited us to the band hall and they came to us. It's something we have never experienced before and we thought 'What's it all about?' It's not your perception at all. They were just so welcoming that you left that evening with a totally different understanding...For me I thought that was really good. And even some of the meetings we had here – through every meeting you were learning a wee bit more about each other. So it wasn't just about the band, it was about finding out a wee bit more about them personally and what their lives were about and things like that...(Female, Catholic).

We kind of all know each other a bit better. They are all very keen, the link has already been made and you are progressing, and you have a whole year to do it rather than three months. You were pushing the smaller project along, whereas the larger project will have more time. And you hope then after that there is something else that they can go on to...The support phase is scratching it (the surface), the next one they will be crawling, and you need somewhere for them to walk to and then somewhere to run to...(Female, Catholic).

While levels of interaction between the broader band (and loyalist community) and local Catholic community have not yet been greatly impacted upon, it was hoped that involvement in the phase two larger project may play a role in this. However, it was considered very significant that the band were engaging in this programme given the fact that it is the first time they have been involved in good relations and cross-community activities. The band are governed by the local Orange lodge who voted in favour twice for participation in the project which is also a significant step (firstly on the cross-community and secondly on the cross-border dimension). Building relationships with key members within the band and the local lodge was also viewed as useful, as quite often rumours and a lack of communication could increase tensions in the town:

Even with the parade on Saturday, now we can ask them (band members) about times, 'The wee un's will be coming out of the (Santa's) grotto at 5pm, is it ok for you to stand this side of the car park or whatever?' There's engagement there. Things you felt you would have went to the top before, you can go to the band members now and they will go to the top for you, they'll do the asking and get a better result. Before we got, 'That's what we do', and that was it. There was no compromise, whereas now there is...and our kids be in at night now and when they hear the band practising they are listening to hear what tunes the band are playing, as they do play tunes that are recognisable to both sides. That's what we are trying to teach them in our music workshops, it's the words that people put to music that can make it sectarian (Female, Catholic).

It was felt that relationships between young Catholics and Protestants in Glennfinn had visibly improved as a result of the programme, with the programme coordinator commenting on young people from both communities who had participated in the small project now being more likely to 'hang out' with one another about the town. The fact that 59 young people participated in the final concert of the small programme in December 2012, when only 15 had originally been expected to, indicates the extent to which interest in the project amongst young people grew as it progressed.

Ultimately representatives of the three participating organisations hope that continued involvement in the project will lead to an increased understanding between participants, greater mutual respect, improved levels of knowledge of why parades happen as well as why some people protest at parades, and ultimately a more peaceful parading situation in the town. It is too early to comment

on whether or not the latter goal will be attainable given levels of opposition in some quarters to the partnership, but nevertheless this example highlights that the process of engagement between RDC staff, organisational committees and participants over a long period of time through the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme has certainly had an impact at transforming relationships between individuals and organisations with little or no prior working history with one another.

Case study Two - Garrison Community and Sporting and Social Club & Garrison Church of Ireland

The Garrison Community and Sporting and Social Club is made up of 12 volunteers from a predominantly Catholic background. In 2009 a young PSNI officer was targeted by a gun attack in the village, an incident which highlighted the challenges which remain in terms of trying to promote greater levels of interaction between communities. Prior to the programme there was little interaction at any deep or meaningful level with their Protestant neighbours as commented on by a representative of the organisation:

... (before the programme) we knew our neighbours...we all live harmoniously in a little village, or as we thought, we all knew our neighbours. And we'd meet our Protestant neighbours and we'd speak. We wouldn't delve too deep into conversation and you'd be careful with what you say (Female, Catholic).

RDC paired the group up with a Church of Ireland group from the town (again 12 members), which was the very first time that members of both groups had any formal contact with one another. Proceeding cautiously, again initial workshops and mentoring support from RDC staff provided the space for individuals to get to know one another over a period of time before both organisations embarked on a residential which included a 'Bombs and Bullets' tour of the murals in west Belfast as well as a visit to Farset International to listen to the experiences of Belfast based groups in terms of engaging in cross-community work. The opportunity to meet, talk and interact was found to have been very beneficial in promoting discussions at a deeper level:

Before we began the journey together our two communities lived side by side without really taking much interested in each other. But I feel to date we have achieved a lot and we have already had a few joint functions...I feel we have built strong and positive relationships which have set the benchmark for a positive future for our generation and hopefully for many to follow. From Garrison 'First Steps', we are now 'Garrison Working Together' (Female, Protestant).

It must be noted that to date the impact of these changes has been limited to a small number of project participants rather than the wider community, however, the example of Garrison is but one of the partnerships in which participants felt more confident and empowered to change the nature of how they engaged with members of the 'Other' community. Several participants from other partnerships expressed concern that other programmes they had been involved in began more contentious discussions before relationships were in place, and such an approach could actually do more damage to community relations. Given that a small number of groups had never participated in cross-community discussions before, this was felt to be particularly important. Rather by people working together and getting to know one another over a period of time, the conversations as part of the good relations elements of the programme came about more 'naturally'. Given that time had

been given to get to know participants from the 'Other' group, interviewees felt that there tended to be greater levels of respect amongst participants for the viewpoint of the 'Other':

...we would have discussions amongst ourselves now and would say, 'Well you have to look at it from someone else's point of view' (Female, Catholic).

Case Study Three – VOICES & Coolnew Opportunities

VOICE's Women's Group was formed in 1997 in the Turf Lodge area of West Belfast. The organisation is based in Holy Trinity Youth Club and the current programme coordinator has been in post since the year 2000. The group originated out of a mother and toddler's group and has approximately 60 members. Many of the local women involved with the programme were significantly impacted upon by the 'Troubles', and many would have mental health and psychological issues arising from the impact of the conflict as well as the high prevalence of suicide and self-harm in the local area.

The Coolnew Opportunities group is based in Rathcoole in Newtownabbey and most of its user base involves local women who have also been impacted upon by the conflict, albeit from a loyalist background. Given that the group were only formed in 2010, they have much less experience than VOICES and had been involved in very little cross-community work prior to participating in the programme. As such the support phase and small project were designed to enable the women to get to know one another while increasing their confidence to engage on more sensitive issues. Both the VOICES group and Coolnew had prior contact with one another in 2010 in a visit to the Somme, but had little if any regular or sustained engagement prior to engaging in the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme:

...Even though we had contact before the programme, what happened was we seen them two years ago and then didn't see them for months...we didn't see them that often. We needed to be doing something together to hold it together...there was some friendships formed in Belgium but nothing really in depth, it was more superficial. But once the story telling started they developed an understanding of each other, I don't think that would have happened without the support (of the programme) (Female, Catholic).

With ongoing support from RDC staff to build relationships, initial programme activities included 30 women (15 from each organisation) going on study visits of one another's area as well as some basic good relations discussions on a single identity basis to prepare the women for engagement. An initial cross-community residential which was organised focused on storytelling about each woman's life based around beadwork. Each participant made a bracelet with different beads representing different things in their life which they then discussed in small groups:

Even things that you think are straightforward can stir up a lot of emotion, even just looking back on your life... And a few in the group have people that died through suicide....and a lot of women in the group would have mental health problems and that really came out on residential...(name) asked the question how many in this group is on anti-depressants, and the majority of the group put their hands up, and I think that was a big thing as well, that they realised that they had a lot in common too...they were so honest, that was a big factor in pulling them together, they were hugging each other and all, so we are doing a big thing on suicide awareness in February (2013) (Female, Catholic).

The encouragement of regular contact between the groups over the weeks and months by RDC allowed for the further organising of good relations workshops and the small project culminated in December 2012 with a residential at which contentious issues were discussed at length for the first time for many of the women. Involvement in the programme was felt to have 'moved the conversations on', beyond that of polite talk into something of much greater substance which was more useful to peace-building in the longer-term:

On the Protestant side a lot of the girls hadn't been involved in any conversations 'around the kitchen table', so this has been a fantastic opportunity for them. It's great that we have had this opportunity to mix. They may only be ten minutes up the road but they may as well have been 100 miles away from us... (Female, Protestant).

There was a girl at the residential and she said, 'If you were to say to me that you were involved in (paramilitary) stuff like years ago, that's ok. I would be ok with that, because I know you now and I would let all that go'. So there are those deep friendships that have developed, you know....this weekend now they started getting to the nitty gritty, the 'Troubles', but they were ready for it. I think you have to be ready for it. Our ones here talked about the British army and their experiences...and one of the girls turned round and said 'If anyone had said that to me two years ago I would have went on the defensive'. And it was good for us because we were able to talk to women who had loved ones in the British army and hear their side, so it got past that demonising the group...it's not about blaming, it's about understanding why things happened, you're not justifying it - you are asking what drove you to take part in certain activities? (Female, Catholic).

Both groups have decided to proceed with their partnership to the larger project phase which they have called 'Cool Voices'. This larger project will include further opportunities for story telling through a 'Listening Ear' project, and it may have a potentially wider impact as activities are planned to include several generations of women across the membership base of both organisations. This opportunity to hear perspectives different from the usual narratives emerging within their own community was one which was suggested by many interviewees as being an important impact of the programme in terms of challenging stereotypes and changing perceptions.

Case Study Four - Belfast South Community Resources & Short Strand Community Forum

Belfast South Community Resources has been in existence in one form or another since the late 1990s. The organisation is based in loyalist Sandy Row in South Belfast and prior to participating in the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme they had not engaged in cross-community work before. However, the user base of the organisation has changed in recent years. Approximately one-third of users now come from a Catholic or minority ethnic background. This is because the organisation houses an extensive computer suite and provides accredited training facilities in ICT. The organisation would take referrals from other organisations right across the city.

Located in the nationalist enclave in East Belfast, Short Strand Community Centre is part of the Short Strand Community Forum which is an umbrella body providing advice and support to 23 local groups. Neither organisation had any contact with the other before the programme and RDC facilitated the initial contact before the joint application for a small project was made. Representatives of Short Strand Community Centre welcomed the fact that this partnership

broadened out their contacts across the city rather than the usual approach of simply pairing them up with an organisation in Inner East Belfast which it was suggested can at times be 'tokenistic'.

Initial workshops facilitated by TIDES Training as part of the support phase identified that participants from both groups wanted to focus on issues of common concern for both communities; unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, and challenging a lack of aspirations or hope for the future. The development of the 'Reaching Out' project between both organisations was therefore based on this realisation that both groups are based in working-class, socio-economically deprived areas in Belfast which have more things in common than they have sectarian issues that divide them.

The overall small project phase provided training for young people from both communities and focused on ICT skills, securing a fork-lift truck driving licence or childminding courses. It was felt to be crucial that the programme included practical, skill building opportunities for young people who have little or no formal qualifications, particularly in the current economic climate. More than 20 young people from both communities progressed through the fork-lift training while 20 young females completed the childminding course.¹ **According to community representatives seven young people have secured employment since taking part in the programme.** Representatives of participating organisations believed it was much easier for them to encourage young people to participate in good relations activities if there was the 'carrot' of achieving a qualification and improving their employability:

If I had said to the younger ones, 'Do you want to go over to Sandy Row and talk about parades?', the answer would have been 'no'. If I say to them, 'Do you want to go to Sandy Row to get a qualification and maybe get a job?' and those conversations happen at some stage, it's much easier to get them involved...it's not 1996 anymore, it shouldn't just be about community relations, it has to be about more... (Male, Catholic).

Given that Sandy Row is the accredited training centre, young people from Short Strand travel to Sandy Row to complete the course. Despite initial reservations about doing so, young trainees from Short Strand now use the facility on a weekly basis. Participants visit each other's areas for other activities such as good relations workshops. The groups are taking part in a larger project as part of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme which will involve developing links between mother's and toddler's groups in both areas, developing a joint youth intervention and summer scheme, a joint art project and producing a DVD to 'capture the story' of the partnership. But one of the key successes of this partnership has been that the project has focused on areas of common concern, and working these socio-economic issues in to build up the capacity of individuals to get a job *alongside* good relations discussions. According to one group representative, engagement in the programme has been '*one of the most genuine partnerships we have been involved in*' precisely because it was not purely 'forced' good relations work without any more practical outcomes. Good

¹ The small project phase also included the redevelopment of the Fairy Tree site in Sandy Row. The tree has been left untouched in the area over the years despite redevelopment. Young people from both areas through Blythefield and St. Matthew's primary schools and Charter and Doyle Youth Clubs came up with the idea of developing a 'wishing well' on the site.

relation activities and outcomes were felt to have complemented the skill building aspects of the programme.

Case Study Five – REACT & Doohamlet District Development Association

Formed in 2002, REACT (Reconciliation, Education and Community Training) is based in the ecumenical heartland of Ireland in the centre of Armagh, and aims to support marginalised individuals and groups with a range of activities. Key areas of the organisation's work include education and training programmes for young people, community relations work to overcome division and promote reconciliation, community development to build the capacity of local groups and support for the victims of violence. Although not exclusively so, many of REACT's clientele would come predominantly from the Protestant community in the mid-Ulster area. Conversely, Doohamlet is a small village located across the border in County Monaghan approximately 25 miles away with a membership which is predominantly Catholic.

There was some contact between the committees of REACT and Doohamlet dating back to 2009 when two members of each organisation completed a Community Leadership Programme organised by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action. This initial contact led to a joint application being submitted to RDC to participate in the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme in 2011. The main activities organised through the partnership for the small project focused on two key areas – a digital photography course which was organised over the summer of 2012 entitled the 'Then and Now' project, and walking tours of one another's area. Both of these activities aimed to build relationships between committee members. According to representatives of both organisations, both the photography course and walking tours provided space for committee members from both sides of the border to get to know one another and find out what life was like for the 'Other' community across the Irish border during the 'Troubles':

Most of our members had never done cross-border work so for them it was a huge step...we needed to spend time first to get to know one another to build up to the good relations discussions...but we found we had informal chats about things, that happened a lot (Female, Protestant).

Some of their people had never been down here (south) and some of our members hadn't travelled up north (Male, Catholic).

This latter point is perhaps the most significant impact of the partnership between the two organisations – according to interviewees, participants from Armagh were more willing to travel south of the border as a result of participating in the programme, and similarly participants from County Monaghan were eager to come north to explore and even shop in Armagh, an area which they had largely avoided during the Troubles. This building of trust between members of the two committees was not just restricted to programme activities, and individuals from both groups reported being more inclined to go north or south in their own daily lives than had been the case previously. One visible example of this was when members of REACT travelled south to Doohamlet to attend the opening of a community garden in the village in the summer of 2012 which was not part of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme, but rather a show of support to their new partners on their own time. It is hoped that further joint activities in the larger 'Crossing the

Borders' project in 2013 can broaden out the impacts of the programme into both communities more generally.

Case Study Six - Ophir Rugby Football Club & St. Enda's GAC

Ophir Rugby Football Club is the oldest rugby club in Northern Ireland and is based at Mallusk playing fields. With no facility to speak of (other than a portacabin for changing purposes), and a membership of approximately 100 (50 playing and 50 non-playing members), they draw their membership in the main from the local Protestant community. In contrast, their partner organisation, St. Enda's GAC (Naomh Éanna) is just two miles away on the Hightown Road, but has a membership base of approximately 1,000 individuals who are overwhelmingly from the local Catholic community.

The partnership between both organisations began before applying to the programme and was based upon informal conversations between a member of St. Enda's (who also plays rugby for Ophir) and a member of the Ophir management committee. Through word of mouth the groups became aware of the potential support (financially and otherwise) for their partnership through *Integrating Community Organisations* and were accepted onto the programme in March 2011. The thinking behind the application for their 'Integrating Communities in Newtownabbey' small project was that as both clubs draw their membership from the same geographic areas but different communities, it would provide an opportunity to increase levels of understanding in the context of an increasingly divided Glengormley town centre. According to a member of Ophir rugby club:

...we noticed the area becoming a bit more divided, more in your face, and we saw it more with young people (sectarianism) and as members of the community we felt we needed to do something. Sport can be divisive in Northern Ireland, but it can bring people together. It can bust myths and open people's eyes...we believe it's something we should draw young people into and use as a bridge-builder between communities and between generations (Male, Protestant).

Through the support phase, the committees of the two organisations were brought together and supported by RDC staff in initial discussions around sport and community relations, with particular regards to ascertaining the challenges facing young Catholics in playing rugby and similarly the barriers to young Protestants in terms of playing Gaelic. As part of their £5,000 small project it was decided to organise a fun run from Ophir's rugby pitch to St. Enda's clubhouse for players, their families and the wider communities. Approximately 200 people attended the fun run and related events at each grounds, including face painting, drumming workshops and rugby and gaelic skills stations to encourage young people with no experience of the 'Other' game to 'have a go'. In addition, few players or their families had ever been to the clubhouse of the 'Other'. The fun day was felt to have had a positive impact, and for members of St. Enda's the fact that the PSNI closed the road for them while the unionist Mayor of Newtownabbey was also in attendance were significant developments:

The police provided all escorts and closed down the roads, not something you'd usually see between the police and GAA, and the mayor was there, and it wouldn't have been seen at that stage that Newtownabbey was a council which was very supportive of gaelic culture so that was a big eye opener for St Enda's ...(Male, Catholic).

The crucial aspect to the partnership is that both organisations have established a third, and joint enterprise, ORNE Development Association, which is an amalgamation of the names of the two organisations (**O**phir Rugby Club and **N**aomh **É**anna). This jointly managed (five committee members each), and yet independent endeavour, has been established for two main reasons. Firstly, to ensure there was no confusion around finances and to ensure equal roles for both clubs in any future work, and secondly because both organisations see their partnership as a long-term 'work in progress'. As part of this ongoing work they have successfully applied to RDC to be involved with a larger project on the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme which will aim to further take the impact of the work out in to local communities through the establishment of good relations dialogue forums, joint sports training (both in fitness and practically in terms of child protection etc), and good relations work with local women, young people and schools.

ORNE is employing a project development worker to roll out their planned activities over the next twelve months. Both clubs plan to engage through ORNE and their own coaches with eight local schools from all school sectors for a six-week programme of rugby, gaelic and good relations activities to promote partnership working. In this sense young people will be given the opportunity to play a sport not usually accessible for members of their community. This second phase of the project will be completed before the end of 2013. While Ophir Rugby Club has always had a small number of Catholic players, it was felt that some younger Catholic GAA players from St. Enda's had begun to train with them with a view to playing rugby as well as gaelic given that the seasons don't overlap (rugby is a winter game and GAA a summer sport). However, it was felt that so far it appeared to be easier to encourage young Catholics to play rugby than it was to encourage young Protestants to play GAA. Few Ophir players had begun to play gaelic, although club representatives were hopeful that the longer the partnership lasted the more likely this may be to change:

...there are people who are members of Ophir go to St.Enda's, some family and friends of the players have come to both clubs to check things out too (Male, Protestant).

The long-term goal of both clubs, alongside promoting more positive community relations, is the establishment of a shared facility in the Glengormley area both clubs and the local communities can use. In some sense this has been one of the keys to success of this partnership - supporting the shared aims of both clubs to strengthen their core area of activity while at the same time promoting good relations activities through sport. Although club representatives felt that they would have started to work together outside of the *Integrating Community Organisations* programme, undoubtedly the engagement to date with RDC staff has helped solidify the relationship in a much quicker timescale than otherwise may have been possible. The added fact that both organisations are located in close proximity to one another also suggests that this partnership has the potential to last into the foreseeable future, wider political circumstances permitting:

We hope this will be the start of a longer relationship for both clubs, we hope it will of benefit to the wider community, and hopefully in five years from now you will hear about the launch of a new, joint facility, and we hope this is the start of that...(Male, Catholic).

The reality is that the independent body, if we can build on that, that will be the ultimate success if we can get a shared facility that anyone in the community can use, ultimately that's where we want to end up (Male, Protestant).