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# ALTERNATIVE

# Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies

**Deliverable 7.1.: Literature review on restorative approaches in local conflicts of Northern Ireland**

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**ALTERNATIVE**

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**DELIVERABLE 7.1**

**RESTORATIVE APPROACHES IN LOCAL CONFLICTS OF NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Tim Chapman, Derick Wilson and Hugh Campbell**

**University of Ulster**

**With the support of Carina Berg, University of San Diego**

**Introduction**

Through the ALTERNATIVE research programme, the University of Ulster intends to develop alternative ways of understanding and responding effectively to conflicts within and between communities. We will test a restorative justice approach on conflicts which result in harm or violence in Northern Ireland. These conflicts are likely to be between people from different communities defined by political/national/religious identities, between local people and ethnic minorities, and between groups of young people and adults within the same community.

While we will be interested in how the state and its agencies can support or hinder the resolution of conflict and the healing of relationships, our restorative justice approach directs our attention primarily to the engagement and facilitation of those closest to and most affected by the harmful conflicts in active participation in their resolution.

Prior to developing alternative understandings and restorative responses it is necessary to complete a brief review of current practices in these areas. It is important that, in attempting to design and study the delivery of innovative approaches, we do not replicate existing approaches. We need to understand current thinking and practices on conflict in Northern Ireland and explore to what extent they employ restorative principles and practices.

This paper includes a brief historical background to conflicts in Northern Ireland and a summary of current thinking relating to the resolution of these conflicts, and reports of interviews with a sample of those organisations most involved in this area of work. This paper provides a foundation for Deliverable 7.2 in which a model of restorative justice designed to address harmful conflicts in Northern Ireland will be described.

**Historical background**

The Northern Irish conflict is at its core a political struggle over the legitimacy of the state of Northern Ireland (see generally Whyte 1991, McGarry and O'Leary 1995). A campaign for civil rights and equality of opportunity for Catholics in the 1960s was met by a repressive security response and rapidly escalated into violent armed resistance to the British state from armed republican organisations. This provoked a paramilitary response

from loyalists. The violence that ensued for next thirty years resulted in 3,567 deaths and many thousands seriously injured. For most of the 30 years of the conflict Northern Ireland was governed by Ministers from the British government. There was no local democratic assembly. A peace process in Northern Ireland was agreed in 1998 and the violence has been greatly reduced though not eliminated. The political process has engaged in the reconstruction of a power sharing democracy and the strengthening of human rights and equality.

**The Conflict and Security**

During the conflict the British state deployed, in addition to the army, the police, courts and prisons to control paramilitary violence. The criminal justice system, designed to apprehend, prosecute and punish criminal offenders, was adapted to manage people who were organised to break the law for political purposes. Although the criminal justice system also pursued loyalist paramilitaries, it was perceived by republicans as part of the state apparatus directed against their struggle (Ruane and Todd 1996). This was compounded by the fact that police officers (Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland 1999) were predominantly from the Protestant community.

As a consequence many of the most bitter and violent struggles have focused on the institutions of the criminal justice system. These included policing practices such as the use of emergency legislation to arrest and interrogate suspects and releasing confidential information to loyalist paramilitary organisations. Trial without jury in 'Diplock' courts and 'supergrass' trials were contentious issues in the adjudication of politically motivated offenders. The prison system had to contend with internment without trial and a succession of protests over strip searches and over special category status for and segregation of paramilitary prisoners culminating in the hunger strikes (McEvoy 2001). Many judges, magistrates, police officers and prison officers were killed by paramilitary organisations.

These circumstances distracted and inhibited the criminal justice system from its core role of addressing crime. This created a vacuum which was filled by community action. Political

marginalisation, antagonism towards the state and deprivation in Northern Ireland resulted in the growth of a strong network of community and voluntary organisations delivering services to the unemployed, to women, to the elderly and to youth. Many community groups sought to divert young people from offending (Chapman and Pinkerton 1987, Chapman 1995). They were motivated by the perception that the criminal justice system had failed to protect them and to contain youth crime.

Communities were also concerned about the vicious punishments being inflicted on young people by paramilitary organisations for criminal and anti-social behaviour. These included threats, beatings, shooting young people in various limbs ('kneecapping'), exiling young people from their communities and in some cases execution. Paramilitary punishments were a product of a complex set of factors; the contested nature of the state and consequently the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the prevalence of offending in deprived communities, a demand for the control of crime from a beleaguered community, and the strategy of the paramilitary organisations to be perceived as legitimate protectors of the community (Feenan 2002, McEvoy 2003, Monaghan 2004). While many members of local communities supported these draconian measures, they proved no more effective in reducing offending than the state's system of punishments.

**Security and Community Restorative Justice**

Community restorative justice projects began to be established in the mid-90s in a number of mainly loyalist and republican areas. Eriksson (2009) traces their origins to disillusionment within both republican and loyalist organisations with paramilitary punishments. This process of legitimising an alternative to violent retribution did not start from the premise that restorative justice was the solution. It was a bottom-up approach out of which a form of restorative justice emerged.

Community restorative justice schemes were designed to provide an alternative to the brutal punishments inflicted on young people by paramilitaries. In the main, they dealt with neighbourhood disputes, anti-social behaviour and local crime. The schemes were funded by private philanthropy and run largely by volunteers from the local community. In the early stages almost all the work came from self-referrals. Most of the work related to

complaints from local people and paramilitary organisations. In addition to working on specific cases, the schemes in both the loyalist and republican communities invested time in educating their community through presentations and training courses. They tended to emphasise the process resolving conflict and harm rather than outcomes such as reoffending. Hundreds of local people were trained in human rights and restorative values and practices. This not only countered the prevailing culture of violent punishment but also achieved a degree of community ownership of the restorative method of responding to its concerns. McEvoy and Mika (2002, 556) have argued strongly for the value of this 'informalism':

> when it is based upon a genuine commitment to the values and practice of restorative justice; located in politically organized and dynamic communities; well managed and staffed by committed volunteers; and guided by locally developed standards of practice which are based upon accepted human rights principles.

## Conflict and community relations

In addition to the violence by paramilitary organisations and the state security forces, the conflict aroused daily inter-communal conflict between the Catholic and Protestant communities. This included major riots, the expulsion of the minority group from neighbourhoods dominated by one community, and spontaneous assaults motivated by sectarianism. Most people in Northern Ireland live in communities, which are almost exclusively made up one religious tradition and most children attend schools, which are either Catholic or Protestant. Many communities 'interface' with the 'other' community, often protected by 10 metre 'peace walls'.

Relations between communities became a key issue during the conflict and remain so during the peace process. While restorative justice approaches were introduced into Northern Ireland in the '90s, there is a much longer history of community relations, peace building, conflict resolution and mediation which can be traced back to the beginnings of the civil conflict in the '60s.

Serious community relations in Northern Ireland is a search for practical ways for people of different identities, backgrounds and goals to live and work with one another with mutual respect. Coping with the real inter-communal tensions around political divisions in Northern Ireland has always been difficult, and there is clearly no single blueprint of what this means in practice.

Community relations policy and practice reflect the delicate balance between the need for members of different identity groups to agree to the laws of their country of residence and be treated as equitably as any citizen of that nation, and yet at the same time be allowed the space and freedom to retain their different identities and have the right not be assimilated into the dominant culture. Experiences have shown that both the assimilative and pluralist policies need to be present in a society with a range of different identity groups; this is especially true in a chronically divided society such as Northern Ireland.

Government policy in Northern Ireland has followed both these strategies, though one tends to be more of a priority than the other at any given time. The central issue is whether the different identity groups can live and work together in a just relationship whilst being allowed to maintain their own distinctiveness as long as they wish it. There is certainly a fear from many Protestants that community relations work is an exercise in assimilating them into a United Ireland; whilst on the other hand, community relations work can be seen by Catholics as a means of strengthening the Union between Northern Ireland and Britain. Because community relations in Northern Ireland has focused on inter-personal and inter-group encounters, the Protestant community has tended to feel it is confronted with its 'enemy'. Only when such encounters involve meetings between the Catholic community and the state, such as police officers, do Catholics feel threatened and angry in the same way.

In 1971, a Ministry of Community Relations and a Community Relations Commission was established. The Ministry was responsible for:

- advocating policies which would improve community relations;
- administering the Social Needs Fund by directing resources to those areas of social and economic deprivation;

- financing the Commission.

The Commission, broadly modelled on the British Race Relations Board, was tasked with:

- supporting community relations focused projects;

- encouraging educational programmes;

- undertaking a number of research programmes.

It has been well documented that the central focus of the Commission was in initiating a community development strategy within communities in order that they might eventually gain the confidence to 'reach out' to the 'others'.

The major problem with this approach was, and still is, that government bodies and institutions were not part of this process: the focus of community development is with the community 'out there' and not us 'in here' within the major institutional structures. When community relations is tied to community development then it can lead to a large number of people in other, more powerful sectors ignoring the fact that they too are part of a deeply contested society. Because street trouble happened between communities, the solution was handed to those communities. The way in which 'communities' interacted with the structure of the entire political, social and economic framework went unquestioned and therefore no change was required of their internal practices.

Two related problems emerged from defining community relations as a community development practice. The first one was that those who made policies and held the purse strings never became aware of the changes they themselves needed to make. The second problem was the growing fear from politicians, from all camps, that the Commission's strategy was empowering community groups to by-pass their elected representatives. They began to see the community sector and therefore the Commission as a potential rival intent on undermining their power base. The result was that in 1974, the Community Relations Commission was disbanded.

The mid 1970s to late 1980s was characterised by distributing community relations responsibilities among the Department of Education, local government, and community and voluntary organisations. Community groups were the most active in community relations work with methods ranging from focused community relations work to more

contextual work where community relations issues are integrated into other activities. Fitzduff (1989), in her typology of community relations work, identifies a number of subject areas such as mutual understanding, anti-sectarian, cultural traditions within the more focused approach. She argues that some bridge must also be built to make community relations accessible to those whose priorities are not primarily community relations. One of the main themes of this report is the vital need to look at the relevance of various community relations approaches, mainly developed in the community and voluntary sectors, to groups and organisations whose prime focus is not community relations but who live and operate in Northern Ireland.

Following a number of years of unstructured thinking on its Community Relations strategy, the late 1980s saw a return of community relations to the government's agenda. Two bodies were established: the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) in 1987 and the Community Relations Council (CRC) in 1990. CCRU forms part of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and was established to advise the Secretary of State on all aspects of relations between the two main traditions in Northern Ireland. The intention was to ensure that community relations would be considered as an integral part of the decision making process within government. According to CCRU, this is achieved through challenging and reviewing government policy and developing and supporting new ideas at grass roots level through grant aid.

However, the creation of CRC led to CCRU handing over most of its grant aiding role to that body. It is now primarily concerned with formulating policy guidelines and monitoring policy performance. The two most important policy guidelines have been Targeting Social Need (TSN) and Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT). Both PAFT and TSN are understood as 'equity' measures, distinct from 'community relations'. This tends to reinforce the implicit assumption that equity is applicable to government structures but that community relations is only applicable to community groups. Once CCRU handed over its grant aiding role to CRC, it therefore divested itself of its strategic community relations responsibilities within government.

The other main area of activity in the late 1980s by government was the implementation of educational reforms. The government began 100% financial supporting of Catholic

schools, supporting the emergence of an integrated school sector and aiding the development of Irish language schools. It also included within the core curriculum two cross-curricular community relations programmes, Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage. Schools are encouraged to come together for various activities as a practical way of developing EMU.

The terms of the peace agreement in 1998 were designed to address the causes of the conflict. Hughes and Donnelly (2003) assessed its impact on relations between the Protestant and the Catholic communities. They found a growing gap between Protestant and Catholic responses over time reflecting a Catholic community growing in confidence and a Protestant community feeling increasingly marginalised by wider political developments. They conclude that the Protestant response reflects a perception that the peace process promotes a Nationalist/Republican agenda that disregards Unionist concerns and political aspirations.

After political devolution was reinstated in Northern Ireland in May 2007, the Northern Ireland Executive planned a new strategy for community relations in Northern Ireland, which would replace A Shared Future: Improving Relations in Northern Ireland (OFMDFM 2005) policy drafted during direct rule. In July 2010, a new policy, Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (OFMDFM 2010), was released for consultation.

Devine, Kelly and Robinson (2011) examined general changes in attitudes of adults towards community relations in Northern Ireland since 1989 using the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes (NISA) Survey, which ran between 1989 and 1996, with the exception of 1992, and the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey, which has run since 1998. Their key findings were that perceptions of relations between Protestants and Catholics have become more positive since 1989, although changes in attitudes have been affected by events at certain times. Perceptions of relations between the two groups over the previous five years were more positive among Catholics than among Protestants, and among younger respondents than among older respondents.

The impact of 50 years of community relations policy and practices are mixed. Relationships between the two main traditions are improving. However, there is a perception that one community is benefiting more from the peace process than the other

and this is a source of continuing resentment, conflict and occasional violence.

**Principles and practice**

Reconciliation activity in Northern Ireland commenced in the mid-1960s with voluntary initiatives that brought together groups of students, school children, development volunteers, trade unionists and church people with an ecumenical vision (Wilson 1994). These activities increased as a response to the crisis of violent civil conflict by the end of the '60s and included residential programmes, holiday play schemes, 'education for mutual understanding' programmes between schools and youth facilities, cross tradition meetings, political dialogue groups and support groups for the families of both victims and imprisoned perpetrators of violence. They helped to transform reconciliation from a peripheral pursuit, narrowly defined in terms of conflict between two opposed traditions, to a significant policy priority of the governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

A need was identified for a more sustained and strategic approach to community relations training for those whose work and lives brings them into immediate contact with community divisions. In the early years, community relations involved youth workers, community workers, teachers and community relations officers in particular. More recently other sectors, such as business management, law and order, health and social services, local action teams and local policy makers have also begun to engage in the problems of community relations.

These developments were greatly aided by the Corrymeela Community, an ecumenical reconciliation community, and the 'Future Ways' programme at the University of Ulster. The Future Ways programme was established in 1985 with the purpose of engaging practitioners and academics working in the field of reconciliation to develop:

· A rationale for underpinning community relations practice;

· Community relations practice within the experience of people on the periphery;

· Quality community relations practice to challenge central institutions;

· The operational core to trust-building.

The first major research programme into the extent and practice of community relations work in Northern Ireland was conducted between 1995 and 1997 by Eyben, Morrow and Wilson (1997). It involved 1,095 questionnaire returns across 15 sectors identifying "how the different agencies and community projects dealt with the regions social and political divisions." The authors define community relations as a search for practical ways for people of different identities, backgrounds and goals to live and work with one another with mutual respect. The study argued for a more sustained and strategic approach to community relations policy, structure and training.

From this research three inter-weaving principles emerged for community relations policy – equity, diversity and interdependence. These principles were incorporated into the 2005 'A Shared Future' policy of the Northern Ireland Government: "The establishment over time of a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere, and where all people are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence" (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minster 2005, 6).

The impact of violence in Northern Ireland has been most felt by people living in disadvantaged urban areas and in rural interface border areas and in mid Ulster (Fay, Morrissey and Smyth 1998). As a consequence community relations work has focused on local communities and taken the form of community development. Many community organisations are involved in 'cross-community work' through which members of the two communities, often young people, meet and share experiences with a view to improving relations. Morrow (2012) has criticised this approach stating that sectarianism is a structure of antagonism which cannot be addressed simply by exhorting people to be nice to each other. He urges government to address the structures sustaining sectarian conflict. Eyben et al. (1997) argue that government bodies and institutions should engage in these principles and not permit community relations to be restricted to local communities.

Future Ways viewed the Northern Irish conflict as a legacy of empire and conceived of reconciliation work as taking place within 'ethnic frontiers' (Wright 1996). Ethnic frontiers

are places of divided loyalties and opposed national identities that are geographically close to different and often historically competing national identity centres. They are characterised by the inability of one group to dominate. For this reason peace, such as it exists, can only be an uneasy compromise. People more readily see members of opposing traditions as 'others' and often learn about them in their absence. This makes it possible to ridicule and demean without being accountable for your views.

A minimum need in a society moving out of conflict is that people are brought into environments in which they can encounter the other. This may involve meetings between people from politically opposed traditions where each person is able to experience how their place is secured through the actions and attention of those they view as different. If people are brought together in an environment that is structurally committed to diversity and guided by a programme that promotes an interdependent society they can foster relationships that erode partisan identities. This work can be fragile but successful practice is possible and has been documented (Fitzduff 1989, Wilson 1994, Wilson and Tyrell 1995).

Reconciliation between equal citizens is then an outcome of new relationships and structures where each has their place. A secure relational environment can be empowering for both parties if it is established with the intention of assisting people to understand the dynamics at work, and enables them to become subjects shaping their own lives, not mere objects of others' manipulations and narrower cultural constraints. The work of Future Ways concludes that a model of equal and different citizenship is the best defence against violent community partisanship.

Since the ceasefires and the commencement of a planned peace process outlined in the Good Friday agreement, the scale and scope of community relations dramatically increased largely due to funding from the E.U. and the International Fund for Ireland. The peace agreement resulted in strong regulations on equality of opportunity and a commitment to human rights. However, there has been no substantial institutional change other than the radical reform of the police service. As a result of the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland (1999) the police service has changed its name from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Police Service of Northern

Ireland, introduced a new recruitment policy to ensure that the proportion of Catholic police officers was increased, introduced a culture of human rights and committed to a model of policing with the community. No other state institution has been subject to such fundamental change.

Every district council and a wide range of voluntary and community based organisations are now engaged in community relations work. While there has been a significant expansion in activities designed to improve community relations, projects remain localised and small scale and there is a lack of political commitment to reconciliation and a shared space for diverse identities in Northern Ireland. It could be argued that the power-sharing arrangements for government maintain a vested interest in division rather than integration through a form of identity politics. Although violence is reduced and contained, it is always present beneath the surface and erupts from time to time. As a result peace in Northern Ireland is fragile and vulnerable to events.

John Paul Lederach has also had a significant influence on community relations practice in Northern Ireland. His approach is constructivist, exploring the meanings protagonists give to conflict. Similar to the Future Ways principle of interdependence, Lederach emphasises interconnectedness particularly to enemies. He urges people to understand the enemies' perspective and to avoid simplistic good-bad or right-wrong thinking in relation to conflict. Critically he promotes creativity and the belief in the potential for change in conflict resolution. Each of the facets of practice entails taking risks in the name of peace.

After more than thirty-five years of conflict, the language of reconciliation is an integral part of the political and institutional discourse of Northern Ireland. However, there remains an urgent need to change the way people from competing traditions relate, given the growth in racist attitudes and behaviour over recent years.

## A review of current practices

This review was undertaken during the months of July to September 2012. It was conducted through interviews of 13 organisations engaged in addressing inter-communal and inter-generational conflict resulting in violence or harm in Northern Ireland. These organisations are a sample of the many organisations engaged in this work throughout Northern Ireland. They are all based in Belfast and consequently do not represent the full range of approaches in Northern Ireland.

### Civic approaches

The Belfast City Council Good Relations Office deals with a wide range of conflicts. The Good Relations Office runs many programmes centred on city-wide unity. Programmes include the Programme for Promoting Positive Expression of Cultural Heritage (dealing mostly with bonfires on contentious dates[1]), the REAL programme (equality and rights education), the Migrant Forum focussing on issues faced by the migrant community, and a mediation programme. The aims of all Good Relations work are about promoting cultural diversity, securing shared space, transforming contested space, developing a shared cultural space, and building shared organisational space in Belfast. The Good Relations work targets all peoples in the city of Belfast.

Programmes are designed to decrease sectarianism and racism and to promote a unified city. Their objectives include safer communities, environmental protection (i.e. bonfires), events that are family-friendly and community-based (i.e. street fairs), and projects that engage young people in positive expressions of self, community and culture.

The framework for all Good Relations work is based upon the Good Relations Plan[2] and the Shared Space Policy. The practices originate in the belief that good relations between and within communities are a pre-requisite to all programmes, and that the key to tackling many social issues i.e. quality of life, education, citizenship, all fall under the work of building better relations among the people of Belfast.

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[1] It is the tradition in Protestants areas to gather wood for a bonfire which will be lit on the night of 11 July as part of the celebrations and marches on 12 July commemorating the victory in 1690 of the Protestant King William over the Catholic King James. These bonfires can cause health and safety and environmental risks.

[2] For full text see: http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/goodrelations/docs/GoodRelationsPlan2011.pdf

Some problems with this approach have been identified. The wide variety of funding available to voluntary or community organisations means that the statutory organisations are held less accountable. The availability of funding is also dwindling and this has created a proliferation of organisations competing for the same resources rather than cooperating. The geography and structure of the city is divisive. The need to live in secure enclaves reinforces sectarian division and decrease interactions between communities in contentious areas.

While Belfast City Council use mediation to resolve potential areas of conflict, its approach is not truly restorative. It does not seek to bring together people who have been harmed with those responsible for the harm.

**Training and building the capacity of communities and organisations**

Tides Training and Consultancy is an organisation dedicated to "helping build the community infrastructure necessary to sustain a lasting and equitable peace in situations which have experienced violent conflict."[3] Tides targets many different areas of society including, but not limited to, councils, public service, police and some international work. Tides' objectives are to encourage mediative dialogue and skills and to move these beyond professional boundaries and into an approach for a way of life. The Tides organisation seeks to develop relationships among persons living in contentious spaces and to "support community building through the development of Community Relations/Conflict Management programmes and training provision primarily, but not exclusively, within the territory of Northern Ireland and the Border counties of the Republic of Ireland without distinction of age, sex, race, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, political, religious or other opinion."[4]

Tides has identified five core values that underpin all of its work: transformation, interdependence, diversity, equity, and sustainability. The work of Tides focuses on conflict between groups, both formally and informally, decreasing sectarianism, increasing appreciation of diversity, and addressing homophobia and racism. Tides outlines their approach to their work via six different methods:

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[3] Tides Training and Consultancy Mission Statement: http://www.tidestraining.org/about-us/
[4] Tides Training and Consultancy core values: http://www.tidestraining.org/about-us/

1.  Training and Training of Trainers programme in Community Relations, Conflict Management, Advanced Group Work Skills and Citizenship.
2.  Building cross-community programmes in areas that have directly experienced violence and ongoing tensions.
3.  Supporting ongoing systemic and organisational management development for these initiatives to help build a sustainable future for local projects.
4.  Directly supporting the evolution, piloting and development of new practice based projects.
5.  Undertaking and supporting the research and evaluation of the methodological base supporting community relations and conflict management approaches.
6.  Wherever possible to engage all of these approaches through a collaborative and systemic partnerships with other organisations working locally and/or internationally for peace.[5]

Tides aims to bridge the statutory and community sectors. An example of these practices is Tides' involvement in training police and creating a line of communication between police and Protestants around the contentious parades.

Tides is influenced by Lederach's (2005) *Moral Imagination* using a five-stage facilitated mediation model with modified language and discourse. Tides focuses on relationships and systemic peace-building. They employ a systems-thinking perspective. Tides programmes have the following seven requirements:

1.  An invitation from a locally based organisation.
2.  A clear analysis of the background need for the programme.
3.  An assessment of the phase of the conflict or post conflict to determine the appropriate programme, prevention, intervention, mediative or transformative.
4.  A detailed understanding of the learning outcomes from both a learner and trainer perspective.
5.  A deep commitment to experiential learning as a core methodology.
6.  Flexibility in design to maximise programme availability to the client group.
7.  A commitment to make the learning environment culturally appropriate, stimulating, safe, learner-centred and enjoyable.[6]

Tides' approach to conflict is to enable people to gain the skills required to mediate and resolve conflict. It provides high quality and well regarded training. However, it is not engaged in the training or practice of restorative justice in the community.

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[5] http://www.tidestraining.org/about-us/
[6] Tides' description of mediation practices: http://www.tidestraining.org/services/capacity-building/national/

**Engaging youth**

1.  *Belfast Interface Project (BIP)*

Belfast Interface Project (BIP) is a voluntary organisation that deals with sectarian conflict. The project runs many programmes involving young people that are focused on decreasing young people's involvement in violence where the two communities interface and increasing cross-community relationships.

Its ultimate goal is to increase and build positive relationships between communities living in interface areas. The structure of the programme includes taking the participants away from the exposure to interface violence around contested dates such as 12 July (see footnote 1) and to reduce risk through diversionary activities. The programme supports young people using a coordinated approach with youth workers already working in the target areas. The programme, in addition to bringing together young people from different areas and promoting cross-community relations, also promotes active relationship building among youth workers and youth work providers.

The Inner East/Outer West Belfast Interface Project addresses several key issues identified by the partners and youth workers from the areas, and the staff of BIP. The programme looks at safety issues around interface violence and raises the awareness of young people about the impacts and effects of interface conflicts, violence and anti-social behaviour. The project includes single identity programmes implemented with groups of young people from each of the four communities. These programmes are designed and organised to complement each other so that when the groups of young people come together they have been discussing similar issues and themes. The overall project aims to decrease interface violence overall and to increase relationships between young people from communities all across Belfast by beginning to address the perceptions of the 'other' as the 'enemy' and organising collaborative community projects with the participants in the programme.

BIP develops partnerships with local organisations clustered around the different interface areas in Belfast. Programmes are designed to develop good relations in interface areas where young people engage in conflict with those from the other side. This creates

suspicion, distrust and fear of violence. After BIP ran its first programme, two groups of young people from both sides of the interface area met up at the interface and just 'hung out' which was virtually unheard of before. BIP prepares people for cross-community work by challenging fears and assumptions. They use a model through which they begin by working with each group separately to build confidence and to prepare them to meet the other group ('parallel single identity group work'). Once each group is read they engage in cross-community group work. The last stage in a project would be a cross-community programme with a two-night residential.

BIP's understanding of the issues they are addressing has developed somewhat organically, beginning as a reaction to interface violence. The first project was piloted as a way to help people manage the violence and then trying to stop it. The project was composed of concerned community members and youth workers who developed and implemented a mobile phone network to monitor trouble and coordinate the measures taken to stop the trouble, i.e. one person calling someone from the other side and going up to the trouble spot to talk the instigators out of whatever action they were taking. The project was seen as a good idea, and necessary, but was only a fire blanket: more concrete proactive action needed to be taken.

Even when paramilitary violence had begun to decrease, violence among young people was still an issue. BIP began to work with youth workers from each area to find better solutions. The result of these efforts was the youth mediation approach. Youth workers worked separately with groups of young people on issues around single identity. These groups focused on expressing the views of the young people and the solutions young people suggested. They gave the young people a platform to express their feelings and the rules/guarantees they would need to feel safe meeting 'the other' group. BIP believes strongly in consulting young people and listening to the voices of young people when making key decisions about their communities.

BIP believes that one of the major issues with interface conflict is that there is an inter-generational reproduction of sectarianism. Young people are encouraged by older generations to take part in the violence. There is a need for a holistic and joined-up approach. The work BIP does with young people needs to supplement similar work with

adults and community groups. In addition, BIP believes that interface areas are void of relationships, or void of positive relationships. Cross-community work is vital to any interface work: single-identity approaches working with community groups on their own without addressing the issues around building relationships with 'the other' would not be a long term solution. BIP recognises there needs to be a development of inter-community relationships between community leaders, respected parties, resident groups and women's groups. Single identity programmes on their own do not address the attitudes towards other communities or decrease tensions long-term. It is all about preparing people to meet and then building relationships between communities and community members.

BIP has discovered that women's groups are much more prominent in inter-cultural work and less separated than other groups in the same areas. Women's groups have more in common with one another; they are more empathetic and encourage people to emphasise the things they have in common and to address the difficulties. This is an interesting finding. It suggests that, in the case of women, religious identity and the conflict it is associated with can be balanced by gender roles and problems that women of all identities have in common. This finding will be further explored in the ALTERNATIVE action research in Northern Ireland.

BIP prepare young people who are in conflict and engaged in violence to meet each other and develop greater understanding of each other. In doing so the model has similarities to restorative justice. However, its focus is the prevention of further violence rather than addressing actual incidents of harm.

### 2. *Corrymeela*

Corrymeela is a community that deals with generational and sectarian conflict based on residential programming. Programmes include the Face-to-Face, Faith-to-Faith Programme, the Glencree Leadership Programme, Facing Our History Programme, Forgiveness Education, and the SEED programme. The overall aim of Corrymeela is "embracing difference, healing division and enabling reconciliation. Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable society based on social justice, positive relationships and respect for diversity. The Corrymeela Community strives to embody these values in every aspect of

our lives."[7] Corrymeela is most known for its residential centre in Ballycastle which seeks to be an open village where encounter, truth telling and hospitality are expressed as people contemplate and live out what it means to embrace difference, heal divisions and enable reconciliation. The community is intentional about creating spaces to hear and share the difficult stories and conversations necessary on our way to the freedom of a shared future."[8]

The SEED programme is designed as a ten month programme based around bi-monthly weekend residentials. The aim of the SEED programme is for young people to learn from each other.  The programme targets young people between 18-25 years old from a wide variety of backgrounds, diversity being a key ingredient to the success of Corrymeela's work. SEED's objectives are to use story-telling and sharing experiences to learn from each other on the premise of young people setting the themes for discussion. The idea behind the programme is for the young people to bring, to name, to shape, and to resolve issues with other participants.

Because the programme is driven and developed by participants, the themes and issues addressed vary each year. Common themes revolve around family, and understanding a specific conflict, usually Northern Ireland. Participants have been elected to talk about gender and sexuality, health and well-being: mental and emotional fitness, and spirituality. Family themes include a list of family-related issues: family conflict, moving away from the family, family background and general family life-cycle issues. Participants talk about understanding behaviour, the reasons for behaviours and learned behaviours. The SEED programme works with youth across the borders and focuses on creating a diverse group in terms of class and economic difference, communities with drugs, violence, political violence, religion, ethnicity and 'cosmopolitan crime'. The SEED programme is situated in an international context by bringing participants to an annual international conference in Berlin around the understanding of history and the role history plays in education.

Using the hierarchy of need as a basis, exposure to other people, conflicts and issues is important. The SEED programme focuses on giving young people opportunities to make

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[7] Corrymeela's mission statement: http://www.corrymeela.org/about-us.aspx
[8] Corrymeela Ballycastle's introductory statement: http://www.corrymeela.org/about-us/the-ballycastle-centre.aspx

personal choices, to question 'normal' values and beliefs, expected behaviours and attitudes. The programme focuses on the crucial issue for young people of how to meet and engage with others, and make personal and individual choices while engaging and belonging to a family and community.

This programme is aimed at supporting young people to become good citizens at ease with difference in a pluralist society. It is essentially an educational and awareness raising programme. It does not address specific acts of harm which have affected the participants and in this sense is not restorative.

### 3. *YouthAction Northern Ireland*

The overall aim of YouthAction Northern Ireland is to "support young people as active and equal citizens whose voices are heard, respected and valued."[9] YouthAction targets young people, vulnerable populations, women, the disabled, and the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender communities. YouthAction Northern Ireland "is working with young people to explore the impact of the conflict on their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. Young people are supported to actively play a role in creating a shared, different, stable, fair and peaceful future" (McMullan 2011, 1). YouthAction's objectives are outlined as contributing to a social reconstruction model to bring society to a "normal level of interpersonal and group relations: formal relationships [political and social leadership], normalizing of relationships within communities... mutual interdependence... developing trust [to negotiate] common issues and problems to improve quality of life, [and] reconciliation" (McMullan 2011, 1).

YouthAction addresses peace-building from two main perspectives; masculinity and violence, and peace education. Young men are viewed as both perpetrators and victims of violence. The expected masculine role within a patriarchal society has a significant impact upon the experience of young men in Northern Ireland. YouthAction explores gender conditioning with regards to the conflict: for example, the idea of the men being the defenders of community and culture. Another example would be from the Centre for

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[9] Interview with Martin McMullan, 29 Aug, 2012, YouthAction headquarters, Belfast.

Young Men's research on post-primary school behaviour and the idea of men needing to be 'hard' and closed emotionally.

To address these issues YouthAction works at many levels. It addresses the roles individuals plays and challenges them while constructively celebrating and glorifying community. It looks at the input of media, citizenship, community and politics into these issues. YouthAction does extensive work with young men on mental health with a focus on violence. They discuss masculinity and the perceptions of masculinity and attempt to decrease the stereotypes of traditional masculinity in Northern Irish society as tough, strong, unemotional and defenders of the community. Additionally YouthAction programme participants look at the reasons for rioting: for example, young men's perceptions of the masculine role in their community play a large part in their actions. YouthAction regularly engage young men who have agreed to complete their programme at a restorative young conference facilitated by the Youth Justice Agency. These practices all focus on the role people play in the conflict and their place in creating a new Northern Ireland that is both shared and stable.

YouthAction's work is deeply entrenched in theoretical practice frameworks. It incorporates a youth work and peace education model based on John Paul Lederach's (2005) *Moral Imagination* model. This model outlines four levels of peace-building: individual, interpersonal, community and policy. YouthAction works across these levels simultaneously with attention to areas of intersectionality. They link what Lederach has identified as four core components to peace-building within their practice: the "centrality of relationships (listening, understanding, appreciative enquiry), practice of paradoxical curiosity (scratch beneath the surface), provide a space for creative act and the willingness to risk" (McMullan 2011, 7).

The ideas of sharing space, rebuilding relationships, grievance and forgiveness, as well as exploring the meaning of truth are central themes. YouthAction endeavours through peace education to help young people understand their prejudices and provide a place for everyone absent from fear, ridicule and to redirect energy into a sphere of positivity where respect is valued and difference is celebrated.

As mentioned above YouthAction offers its programme to young men who have participated in restorative justice conferences. In this way, the organisation supports a restorative response to sectarian and other forms of violence by young men.

### 4. GOALS project

The GOALS project is run by Active Communities, a voluntary organisation which uses sport as a means of personal development with young people at risk. It operates in a deprived neighbourhood in west Belfast which has experienced a high level of civil disorder and crime. The project has successfully engaged a group of young men with a reputation for violence and crime. They use drugs and alcohol as a way of dealing with their lives. They are alienated from a community which holds them in contempt. Self-harm and suicide are common reactions among this peer group.

GOALS employs a youth worker from the same area in which the young men live. He has spent time developing a relationship with them and enrolling them in courses connected with sport e.g. coaching, first aid and life guard training. The aim is both to improve their employment prospects and to change the attitudes from resignation to confidence in their future. The combination of relationship building and courses which provide structure and achievement have resulted in most of the young men moving away from their criminal activities and improving their relationship with the community.

This project is very successful in engaging a very alienated and marginalised group of young men who have caused problems for the local community. It has diverted a significant proportion of them from anti-social behaviour and crime. However, unlike a restorative justice approach it has not engaged victims or the local community in dialogue with these young men.

### 5. Belfast Education and Library Board

The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) is the statutory youth service for the Belfast area and has an extensive array of services. BELB's approach to youth services work is based mainly on their legislative and policy guidelines. The overall aim of the Youth Service is to "work with young people to facilitate their personal, social and educational

development."[10]   The Youth Service targets young people and vulnerable populations to enable them "to gain a voice, influence and place in society in a period of their transition from dependence to interdependence."[11] BELB works with registered community groups and youth groups and provides funding and training to youth workers and youth centres.

The identified areas of service delivery are interfaces, vulnerable young people with anti-social behaviour issues and the enactment of the Community Relations, Diversity and Equity Policy[12] (CRED policy) dealing with community relations, sectarianism, interface issues, and immigrant issues.

BELB Youth Service subscribes to a model of effective practice that includes a youth work curriculum framework.  All of BELB's work emphasises personal and social development through education and voluntary engagement.  BELB takes a needs-based approach to its work and adapts programmes to suit specific needs of young people and communities. BELB does this using youth centres designed around providing a space for young people to hang out as well as for delivering voluntary programmes. They fund travel-abroad groups like their Holocaust programme and their West Africa programme.

BELB provides a range of training opportunities for adults involved in youth work including community relations. BELB encourages community relations as part of their work and provides support through the Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme (YSCRSS)[13] based on health, education, arts, training, etc. BELB also offers outdoor education at the Killyleagh Outdoor Education Residential Centre and provides a wide range of outdoor activities.

BELB provide a range of mainstream youth services throughout Belfast. They do not focus on particular harmful conflicts and they do not actively target those most affected by the harm. Consequently their services are not based upon restorative principles.

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[10] http://www.belb.org.uk/Youth/
[11] http://www.belb.org.uk/Youth/
[12] For full policy and quality indicators see:
http://www.belb.org.uk/Downloads/es_cred_quality_indicators.pdf.
[13] Implemented in 2001, seen as a support mechanism for school and community relations development. For an outline of the aims and background to the project see:
http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/goodrelations/docs/conlfict/MacBrideReport.pdf, p.83.

## Supporting ethnic minorities

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) deals mainly with ethnic conflict and the concerns and rights of communities considered ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. The overall aim of NICEM is "to promote good race relations and to endeavour to achieve the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of racial equality."[14] NICEM is not primarily programme-based but takes a policy-driven approach. NICEM uses evidence-based research and advocacy to create change at the political and legal levels to advance the rights of ethnic minorities. NICEM also delivers anti-racism training. In addition to NICEM's rights advocacy work they also run capacity-building programmes in local minority communities focused on economic and social development. NICEM runs advice and support programmes for migrant communities and victims of racial harassment and discrimination. The bulk of NICEM's work targets the most vulnerable populations such as migrant workers.

According to NICEM's website their overall objectives are to "identify and respond to the needs of Black and Minority ethnic communities; defend and promote the rights of Black and Minority ethnic communities; represent and promote the Black and Minority ethnic sector; provide support and leadership to Black and Minority ethnic communities; raise public awareness and understanding of racism, particularly institutional racism; and provide training for potential leaders from within Black and Minority ethnic communities."[15] NICEM has identified five major issues to address: racism, hate crimes, general inequality, unequal distribution of resources and the lack of political will to change. As mentioned above, evidence-based research, capacity-building programmes and legal/non-legal advocacy are main strategies of NICEM's to address these issues. In addition to advocacy NICEM aims to "inform the sector of relevant policy, strategic issues, the structures and decision-making processes of departments and agencies. It will also undertake research into specific issues of strategic importance, disseminate information and facilitate discussions within the sector."[16]

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[14] Aims and objectives section of NICEM's website: http://www.nicem.org.uk/about-us/aims-objectives
[15] http://www.nicem.org.uk/about-us/aims-objectives
[16] http://www.nicem.org.uk/about-us/core-functions

To build community infrastructure NICEM shares information across organisations, supports and advises newly emerging ethnic minority groups and encourages and increases the participation of groups in the wider community. The goal of these activities is to enable the black and minority ethnic sector to increase their effectiveness in providing community development services and to address their current disadvantaged position in society. To advocate for racial equality NICEM communicates advice and support to the public and volunteer/community sectors to implement best practice models of racial equality like ethnic monitoring in service and employment provisions. NICEM runs a programme that provides free legal and confidential advice and support to help victims of racial attacks, discrimination, racial harassment and to lodge complaints against individuals in public authority positions.

NICEM feels that there is a lack of political direction from the government in relation to race relations. NICEM uses all of its research and advocacy within Northern Ireland to work with partner organisations across Europe like the UK government, the Republic of Ireland, the EU, and the UN to campaign for common issues of concern.[17]

While NICEM does not engage in restorative justice, it can be a source of support to both victims and perpetrators from ethnic minorities who wish to participate in restorative conferences.

**Policing and Probation**

### 1. *Police Service of Northern Ireland*

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) aims "to make Northern Ireland safer for everyone through professional, progressive policing."[18] In relation to youth PSNI is focused on decreasing crime and improving the relationships between young people and police. The PSNI uses "a proactive, community-driven approach that sees the police and local community working together to identify and solve problems."[19] The PSNI targets all communities across Belfast and Northern Ireland. PSNI has a wide variety of strategies and issues it deals with under five guiding principles:

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[17] NICEM's description of its core functions: http://www.nicem.org.uk/about-us/core-functions
[18] PSNI's mission statement: http://www.psni.police.uk/about-us.htm
[19] PSNI's mission statement: http://www.psni.police.uk/about-us.htm

1. Personal, impartial and accountable police officers and staff; present and influential in the heart of all communities, in the right numbers to make a difference.
2. Responsible, flexible, 24/7 service; tailor made to the unique needs of the person or place, with a reputation for promise keeping and professionalism.
3. Resources and time focused upon genuine operational delivery. Ensuring we have the right people in the right place to prevent harm, protect from danger and inspire confidence.
4. Challenging the status quo, keeping red tape to a minimum, always at the forefront of value for money and effective practice.
5. Partnership at the heart of our outlook and actions, sharing expertise, information and responsibility. Open and transparent in line with overriding Human Rights or legal obligations.[20]

The PSNI think of themselves as police-practitioners focused on community engagement. The PSNI is not focused on sectarianism, but on law-breaking activities. PSNI are engaged in collaborative work in disadvantaged areas, as well as policing with community strategy for individual area work. After the period of violent civil conflict; a historical enquiries team was set up to look at unsolved murders from the troubles. PSNI partner with local community safety groups and attend regular meetings to discuss a range of community issues. This initiative uses an action-based approach taking concerns raised at partnership meetings and ensuring that they are reflected in actions taken by local neighbourhood police, issue-specific working groups and task forces. For example the Safer Streets initiative combines community members, PSNI and relevant organisations to work together to eliminate crime in their areas.

Police Youth Diversion Officers are trained to deal with individuals in a restorative manner where deemed appropriate. There are also some regular police officers trained in restorative justice voluntarily to work as substitutes for the Youth Diversion Officers. Community Safety Officers also undergo restorative justice trainings.

The police have a vital role to play in restorative justice. They administer restorative cautions to low risk and first time offenders and they participate in restorative youth conferences facilitated by the Youth Justice Agency. The police can only intervene once a crime has been committed and the person responsible for it has been detected. This limits

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[20] PSNI's website: http://www.psni.police.uk/about-us.htm

their involvement in some of the conflicts that the ALTERNATIVE research programme intends to study.

## 2. *Probation Board of Northern Ireland*

The Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI) supervises offenders who are under court orders and engages with individuals to challenge and positively change their behaviour. PBNI's statement of purpose is to make "local communities safer by challenging and changing offenders' behaviour."[21] PBNI targets offenders who have been found guilty by the courts and are subject to a court order. PBNI's overall objectives can be broken down into four core elements:

1. Ensuring sentence compliance: PBNI will hold offenders to account in terms of keeping to the requirements of a court order or conditions of a license and will take appropriate enforcement action where there is evidence of non-compliance.
2. Challenging offending: PBNI will engage with offenders in order to produce positive changes in attitudes and behaviours which will impact on and reduce their likelihood of re-offending in the future. PBNI supports the offender in constructive and effective interventions.
3. Minimizing the harm: PBNI protects communities by using appropriate and proportionate constructive and restrictive measures and controls to minimize the risk of harm to others and promote the safety of victims.
4. Promoting responsible citizenship: PBNI supports offenders becoming better integrated into community and more responsible citizens. PBNI enables offenders to access appropriate services, promote social inclusion of offenders and assist them to make positive changes about their own behaviour.[22]

PBNI works with restorative justice organisations like Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives on interface violence. PBNI aims to increase the use of restorative justice practices and principles in its work. It recognises the need to listen more to victim and community needs. Restorative justice also helps offenders be accountable and helps challenge their behaviour: to understand the context of offending and see the consequences of their behaviour on others. PBNI would recommend offenders to a restorative approach with one of the above community organisations based on the

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[21] PBNI's statement of purpose: http://www.pbni.org.uk/
[22] 2011-2014 corporate plan:
http://www.pbni.org.uk/archive/Guide%20to%20Information/What%20are%20our%20priorities/Corp%2 0plans/Corporate%20Plan%20final%20for%20web%2015.09.11.pdf

details of the individual and case. It is not usually mandatory in probation orders and there are no specific directives or conditions for PBNI to recommend individuals to the process. PBNI has also developed an approach to address hate crime.

Probation can make a contribution to a restorative response to harmful conflicts. However, like the police they are constrained by being part of the criminal justice system and the fact that they can only engage with people who have been referred by courts or prisons.

**Restorative justice organisations**

### 1. *Youth Justice Agency*

The Youth Justice Agency (YJA) is the statutory justice organisation for young people. The aim of the YJA is to make "communities safer by helping children to stop offending."[23] The YJA outline several key values critical to their practices: "deliver services to young people based on proportionality and individually assessed risks, needs and ability... to change, challenge and support young people to be the best they can be... [to] hold young people to account for their offending and, where possible, young people should make good the harm they have done... use research and evidence based practice to inform all work... [to] respect everyone no matter how different they are, and everything... will be underpinned by equality, openness, fairness, honesty and integrity."[24] The YJA targets young people who offend (between the ages of 10 and 17), their families, communities, and victims. The objectives of YJA are to help children address their offending behaviour, to divert young people from crime, to assist with young people's reintegration into the community, and to meet the needs of the victims of crime. These objectives are couched in wider areas of identified priority: making communities safer; faster, fairer justice; delivering effective youth justice; and managing resources.

A core role of the YJA is to provide a youth conference service with young people who have offended, with victims of their offending and with the community to enable the young person to make amends for the harm their behaviour has caused and to support the young

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[23] YJA's statement of purpose:
http://www.youthjusticeagencyni.gov.uk/about_us/mission_statement_and_values/
[24] YJA's value statements:
http://www.youthjusticeagencyni.gov.uk/about_us/mission_statement_and_values/

person to avoid further harmful behaviour. These conferences are based on restorative justice principles. YJA coordinates and facilitates these conferences as well the conference plans that arise at the end of each conference. Every young person has a youth conference coordinator in charge of the actual conference as well as a practitioner who provides support for the young person to complete the actions in their plan. Youth conferences have been at the centre of the youth justice system since their introduction through the Justice (NI) Act 2002.

Most offending by youth in Northern Ireland is no different from anywhere in Europe: crimes of dishonesty, violent and sexual crime, car crime, crimes of disorder etc. However, young people do commit offences out of a sectarian or racist motivation. In such cases they will be invited to meet their victims and will be offered programmes to examine their attitudes often delivered by organisations representing the victimised group.

YJA addresses a wide variety of issues that come up when dealing with young people. YJA encourages young people to get into education, employment or training through Department of Education and Learning schemes as well as addressing alcohol and substance abuse issues through specific programming. YJA encourages young people into programmes addressing domestic and sexual violence where appropriate as well as programming and provision of services for young people to improve their mental health. The YJA also has a concern for early intervention and works with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to identify and help prevent offending at earlier stages.

The YJA is a statutory agency committed to a restorative approach to youth crime. It has played a vital role in developing restorative justice in Northern Ireland. Its engagement in harmful conflicts in the community is limited by its statutory role.

### 2. *The community based sector*

There has been also a thriving community based sector for restorative justice for nearly twenty years in Northern Ireland (Eriksson 2009). Community Restorative Justice Ireland works within Catholic/Nationalist areas and Northern Ireland Alternatives works within Protestant/Unionist areas. Both organisations strive to challenge the culture of violence in working class communities, which is a legacy of the civil disorder. They do so through

public education programmes, training volunteers, and demonstrating by example the effectiveness of non-violent restorative processes. They mediate between offenders and victims and offer support to victims and pathways away from crime to offenders.

These groups provide the obvious partners with the University of Ulster in studying the effectiveness of restorative justice in relation to inter-cultural conflict.

## Conclusions

While many people in Northern Ireland encounter each other through their employment, through shopping and through their social life, most people live in neighbourhoods that are predominantly made up of Protestants or Catholics. The many community relations projects throughout the country offer opportunities for people of different identities to meet and share their experiences. These are voluntary programmes and may not attract those most antagonistic towards the 'other' and most engaged in violence. Those who are arrested for violence or hate crime will be dealt with by the criminal justice system and are unlikely to engage with their victims unless they are under the age of 18 or are referred to a community based restorative project.

The key ideas supporting community relations practice include (Morrow 2012): inclusion and dialogue, alternatives to violence, reconciliation, anti-sectarianism, integration and shared space. The programmes and practices reviewed in this paper have much in common with restorative justice. They emphasise building and healing relationships particularly between young people and communities. They use dialogue and communication to raise awareness of and empathy for the 'other'. Storytelling is also an important method.

The core of many of the programmes is often educational. Skilled facilitators use experiential learning methods to teach the value of good relations and the techniques of conflict resolution and mediation. Other programmes use activities and residential programmes to divert young people from trouble.

The Future Ways researchers were keen to challenge the persistent operational preference in both government and non-government practice for addressing community relations and reconciliation at its most visible points of failure. They believe that an exclusive focus on urban ghettos, victims, paramilitaries, children and young people, condemns community

relations activities to a centre-periphery paradigm that presumes a healthy core of society that is subject to manifestations of sectarian violence on the margins. Furthermore such a focus is on the symptoms of the underlying conflict and is reactive rather than pro-active and transformative.

While there was no local democratic assembly allowing for active politics and government, the emphasis of conflict resolution was on improving community relations. Now that Northern Ireland has a power sharing government, the focus has shifted to institutional change. It seems to us that the real point is to study the relationship between the state and civil society in addressing the conflicts that harm people.

A restorative approach begins wherever there is harm committed by and suffered by individuals, groups or communities. It engages and facilitates those who are closest to and most affected by the harm in its reparation. In doing so restorative justice strives to strengthen relationships and to enable people to learn to live together in peace. Rather than addressing the underlying structures of conflicts and harm with the intention of preventing specific incidents, a restorative approach addresses specific incidents with the intention of developing a culture, social relationships and practices which reduce the risk of harm in the future.

It is this focus on specific harmful events and the engagement of people thrown together in relation to these events that distinguishes a restorative approach from more general peace building or community relations practices. It is this distinction that the ALTERNATIVE research programme in Northern Ireland seeks to explore and evaluate. The research programme will examine how effectively restorative justice can be implemented in civil society with the support of the state.

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External Evaluators:

CJI: http://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports.aspx

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