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Youth Initiatives in Conflict Zones: Focus Northern Ireland

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Introduction

In this paper I am looking at the role of Youth Work in the conflict zone which was Northern Ireland. Firstly, by way of context I will give a brief overview of historical relationship between the jurisdictions. This is necessary in order to understand the way the jurisdictions focus began, with some common sense of purpose, and how this focus began to change as the conflict developed.

The second part of the paper looks more closely at the origins and processes of youth work development within the conflict zone and the thinking's behind the change of emphasis. Here too reference will be made to several organisations which began, from different impulses, and how they were inter-linked with one another as the conflict progressed. One programme initiative which involved all three jurisdictions is highlighted to illustrate this linkage and also the journey from tragedy to understanding. This youth focused initiative was designed to educate, challenge and ideally change perspectives of the participants so that they might become instruments of change themselves. A case study of one young man, Mark, is taken to highlight the fact that change can and does happen through these initiatives.

The final focus of this paper looks at Northern Ireland youth initiatives in a post conflict framework and how the process are being re-evaluated and revised. In conclusion this paper addresses the continual struggle and competition for funding and also the paucity of written studies and long term evaluation of many programmes.

Brief Historical Overview

The island of Ireland is composed of four provinces, Leinster, Munster, Connaught and Ulster. The island was divided in 1922 with the signing of a Treaty between Britain, and the newly formed Free State of the South of Ireland (the current Republic of Ireland). The catalyst for this occurred after the Easter Rising of 1916, and following War of Independence in Ireland against Britain. Although Home Rule had been promised and passed in Westminster it was deferred prior to World War One. This treaty of 1922 divided the island of Ireland into the 26 counties, known then as the Free State, and the six (6) counties of Ulster which would remain as part of the UK.

The Free State had its own government, made laws and governed the people. The six counties (6) counties of the province of Ulster were to remain within the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom, although they were given a measure of devolved power and their own parliament in Stormont. It is important to note three factors here:

Northern Ireland did not include the entire province of Ulster.

Forty per cent (40%) of the population of the newly formed Northern Ireland did not agree to this treaty, were Catholic, and had an allegiance to the Free State in the south from which they were now cut off.

Sixty per cent (60%) of the population were of Planter stock (settlers from 17th century), Protestant and loyal to and identified with Britain.

The Six County Northern Ireland state was set up to secure the Protestant/Unionist population in what would become a Protestant state for a Protestant people. The ensuing years, from 1922 to 1969 when the conflict began, resulted in the forty per cent (40%) Catholic minority being excluded from all the main organs of the State in terms of voting rights, housing, employment and education. Seen as a permanent threat to the existence of the Northern Ireland state, they were often harassed, sometimes ignored by the overwhelming Protestant/Unionist police force (RUC). The division of Ulster itself into just the six counties of Ulster ensured this majority situation. Had the entire province of Ulster been accommodated this 60/40 population divide would not have applied.

The Free State continued to claim the entire island (that is Northern Ireland) as part of the national territory but it was for the most part just rhetoric. As a poor, newly formed entity there was much that needed to be done and the Northern Ireland situation began to be less important. From a British perspective, after hundreds of years of an off and on conflict with the Irish, there was a relief that Ireland was finally off the agenda. Britain had much to do on the home front too after the devastation of the First World War. So it is that the two groups Nationalists and Unionists of Northern Ireland are often characterised as the errant children of neglectful parents. That is to say, that in reality both jurisdictions, the Free State and Britain, basically ignored Northern Ireland and what was happening there, while paying lip service to the two groups of protagonists.

Youth Work in Britain and Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland

The very early movements in terms of youth work can be linked to the Protestant Sunday Schools of the late 18th century. It was an informal way of educating and learning, by working through activities with the young. By the first half of the 19th century there were

what was known as ‘ragged schools.’ These schools were aimed at those who were too poor to access education. The YMCA or Young Men Christian Association were also set up but also had an evangelical bias.

By the 1890’s theories on adolescence were being discussed. By the 1880s girls were being brought into the process, for example, the Girls Friendly Society was set up in 1875. There were the beginnings of the recognition of the social and political dimensions of youth work. The Boys Brigade, had the youth uniformed, drilled and given instruction and this was further developed under Baden Powell, who began the Scouting movement and later the Guides for girls. This brought this type of group activity and learning to an even wider group as the value of adventure was also celebrated.

In the post First World War period there was some funding available for youth work but it would be the late 1950s and early 1960s before it began to really flourish as a concept. The youth club had its best period in Britain during the late 1950s and 1960s. In Britain and Northern Ireland free education was given to all young people as a right in 1948 which gave more people opportunities for social as well as educational interaction. The 1960s, however, began an era of major change not least in demographics in Britain, where the population declined.

In Ireland, the isolationist doctrine of De Valera pursued since the early days of the state was abandoned and an opening up of society began at many levels. In the early 1960s free education was given to all children up to the age of 18 years in the Republic. In both jurisdictions by the 1970s, the advent of home entertainment in the form of television and then video had begun, and computers would follow. This meant that much entertainment was available in the home setting, and young people shared much greater participation in the formal education sector at all levels, and also many new leisure options came on stream. The result was that the youth club option of earlier times began to diminish as a option for young people. In 1969 the violent conflict in Northern Ireland erupted.

The Effect of the Northern Ireland conflict

Perhaps at this point it is worth defining what is meant by Youth Work in general terms by the late 1960s. It was

- A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of the young through their voluntary involvement, and which is -
- (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and
- (b) Provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.

In broad terms this definition applied to all three jurisdictions.

When the conflict began in Northern Ireland, however, there was a realisation that the attraction of the ‘riot’ and or of becoming involved in one or other of the violent organisations was increasingly becoming more of an option for the young. This was particularly true in working class areas although not exclusively so. The civil rights agitation of the late 1960s was initially an avowed non violent movement, but events and incidents and some infiltration by those with a violent agenda, meant that it was overwhelmed. Then, there

were atrocities like Bloody Sunday and Bloody Friday, tit for tat random killings of one side or the other, fears that Britain was going to ‘sell out’ the Unionist community to the Irish in the south, and internment without trial which was aimed at Catholic nationalists solely. All of these factors contributed to the involvement of young people in violent paramilitary organisations, on both sides of the Unionist/Nationalist divide

There was some resentment too; that the Catholics (while not recognising the Northern Ireland state) had taken advantage of the Education Act (free education) of 1948, and also of the generous welfare options which the state provided. In addition, in the 1970s in particular, there was a belief by the IRA and violent Republicanism that once they kept the pressure on the British, they would go from Northern Ireland sooner rather than later. From the foregoing the breeding ground for the radicalisation of the young and impressionable in both communities Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist is clear.

At another level, many in the Unionist community had had job security passed from father to son in the shipyards and other industries for generations, which lead them to become less engaged in academic education. Then in the 1960s, the shipyards began to be less secure or prosperous, and new industries shied away from setting up in Northern Ireland because of the violence. Unemployment increased. There were those, also, who fuelled fears and promoted certain beliefs and agitated for their cause within both Northern Irish communities, so that young men, listening to their rhetoric were moved towards violence as the only real answer to the problems. The need for other ways of focusing young people’s energy and resourcefulness became more acute in Northern Ireland. One of the earliest organisations, which was ready when the conflict began, and assisted in practical and useful ways was the Corrymeela Community.

The Corrymeela Community founded in 1964, a Christian community was set up before the ‘Troubles’ began, to ‘counter apathy and complacency and open up new possibilities.’ The centre in the early days when the premises in Ballycastle was founded required volunteers for their work camps. Then as the violence erupted Corrymeela adjusted its programmes ‘to meet the new challenges of people and families at risk in troubled areas, with intimidation, injury and bereavement.’ Today there continue to be programme initiatives available to young people which assist them in the post conflict adjustment period, as they have all through the years of the conflict. Corrymeela was and is a safe haven.

Many youth organisations came into existence in the North throughout the ongoing years of the conflict and increasingly linkages were made to each another. In the South which escaped the worst ravages of the Northern Ireland conflict, except on a few occasions down the years, the emphasis of Youth Councils went along the more traditional lines of education and re education, skills and adventure training, lobbying on relevant youth related issues and youth wings of political parties. One of the most pervasive youth organisations in the Republic is the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association). This organisation, voluntary and amateur in status, has a foothold in almost every small town in Ireland. Formed to reclaim Irish sports in the years just prior to the Easter Rising and War of Independence in the early 1900s ‘ it promotes and controls the national games of hurling, Gaelic Football,’ amongst others. It is at once a family and youth focused organisation. The GAA also had local organisations in Northern Ireland but it there it was seen as a strictly nationalist organisation and serving one side of the community only.

In the South of Ireland, ten years on from the beginnings of the conflict, Cooperation North as it was then, was set up. The originators believed that ‘ a lack of communication and understanding between the people of Northern Ireland and of the Republic of Ireland had bred a deep mistrust and suspicion, between the two communities and had contributed to the violence on the island of Ireland.’ Cooperation North known now as Cooperation Ireland has been involved with cross border youth programmes for many years since its inception.

As the conflict raged in Northern Ireland, the bonds between the Republic of Ireland and Britain deepened. This occurred at a political and at a social level. This was in part due to the intractable nature of the conflict, the difficulty in finding agreed strategies with the respective groupings in Northern Ireland, and a general puzzlement and eventually irritation with both groups in the province. Further, people in the South of Ireland rarely travelled to Northern Ireland and began to weary of the conflict and the effect it was having on the perception of Ireland internationally, and in the areas such as tourism, a vital component of the economy. The conflict initially detracted from the business of attracting international companies opening up in the Republic of Ireland but a vigorous and long term strategy countered this perception over time. Bit by bit many in the South began to turn away from the Northern troubles. In Britain, for the most part, the British people did not feel any allegiance to Northern Ireland and did not understand why bombs were going off in England, in the name of Irish freedom. Another factor in the UK, was the large number of first and second generation Irish, who had made their lives in England and who sometimes experienced an anti-Irish backlash after some IRA attack.

With the foregoing in mind, and realising that those involved in the problem must get involved with the finding of a solution, many youth organisations in the three jurisdictions began to work together. Before illustrating that, however, it is worth noting how the process of working with youth in conflict evolved in Northern Ireland in particular.

How Initiatives Evolved

There was in Northern Ireland a realisation that young people from each community, Protestant/Unionist, and Catholic/Nationalist more often than not, met for the first time, when they attended College , if that option was open to them. The societal structure in the pre college years meant that many young people in Northern Ireland lived in separate orbits, with separate schooling, separate traditions and celebrations. Further these very traditions and celebrations were often seen by one side or the other as antagonistic. The young people may have looked the same, talked with the same accents and dressed in whatever the conventional or rebellious fashion of the times was, but in essence they did not know each other. This lack of knowledge about each other and the need to offer an alternative to the violent option, became the essential challenge for youth work initiatives.

The early programmes in youth work during the conflict often focused on letting the groups simply get together, perhaps around some task, such as football or adventure training etc. Here the young people interacted freely and got to know each other at a fairly basic level. The next stage which began to evolve was to be to have them engage as before around a task, but to include something about the way they worked together, team building, leadership and perhaps some reflection on the reality of their own lives, sharing their experiences in a safe environment. In Northern Ireland during the conflict one of the more well known phrases was, ‘Whatever you say, say nothing’ and another was ‘lose talk costs lives.’ In the light of this type of thinking it is easy to surmise that contentious issues were most likely avoided.

As the conflict progresses and with the onset of other organisations, often born out of grim tragedies, such as the Peace People in the mid 1970s, the two options alluded to, began to have another dimension added, which was to question the society, the history, the myths and reality of this society, which they as young people had inherited. The inching forward with dialogues with one another enabled them to question more seriously their own beliefs and prejudices, and begin the journey of understanding, of seeing other's perspectives, relating to each others' hopes and fears. These early explorative workshops were the change factor in youth work in the conflict, and led them inevitably to question who the other actors in the historic drama were; who needed to be talked to and with. At the same time opportunities to engage with other conflict areas worldwide began to grow. Exchanges took place which helped to lessen the isolation and sense of hopelessness as new ideas, possibilities and options began to develop.

A natural progression was inevitable from the examination of what had gone wrong in the society, the causes and effects of conflict, to what is required to create a 'just society.' Here initiatives which involved politics and human rights began to develop, so, for example, the Youth Forum had a group working on a Bill of Rights, while other organisations developed resource packs on various issues. Another component in the development and sustainability of the many youth initiatives which happened, as the conflict raged, was the training of young people as leaders and peer educators.

Key Organisations in Northern Ireland

Corrymeela and Cooperation Ireland have already been mentioned, but there were other youth organisations which became active throughout the 1970s, '80s and '90s in Northern Ireland. Some were born out of a developing need, from a grassroots basis. The Youth Forum set up in 1979 was the first cross community initiative funded by the Department of Education. They also developed an international dimension and later became involved in political education. They are active in schools, communities and with government and 'believe that all young people have ideas and opinions worth listening too.'

The Youth Council and the Community Relations Council funded projects which met certain criteria and Youthnet in addition had a strategic networking and advocacy function. Smaller more locally based organisations came into being also. Organisations which identified a local need, such as The Base. This organisation, set in a loyalist working class area, specifically targeted young people who were likely to become involved with some paramilitary organisations. Youth Action Northern Ireland also addressed young people struggling to find their place in an ever changing society. They focused on maximising skills and education in a variety of contexts including, youth arts, gender and equality, rural and urban issues. They also identified young men as a group which needed special attention. They carried out research and lobbied the Government. The Prince's Trust Northern Ireland, an offshoot of the British version, had a focus on unemployed youth and offered ways of building confidence, esteem and skills, through courses and education and also funded start up businesses.

Some youth work organisations developed out of particular tragedies including the Peace People, the Spirit of Enniskillen and the Warrington Peace Centre in the UK. In the south of Ireland, the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation just outside Dublin which was set up originally in the 1970s, was active throughout the conflict, although it fell away somewhat for a number of years. In the early 1990s, after the spontaneous eruption of protest in 1993,

against the IRA Warrington bombing, Glencree began several programmes including a youth programme which encompassed Northern Ireland, Southern Ireland and Britain. It also began a schools Peace Studies programme aimed at 15/17 year old students. Both, of these programmes were successful and constantly developing and growing right through the 1990s up to 2008.

EMU

The Education for Mutual Education schools programme in Northern Ireland has had mixed reviews on its effectiveness down the years. The objective of the programme was for the young 'to learn, respect, and value themselves and others; to appreciate the interdependence of people in society.' It also focused on understanding cultural diversity and taught new ways of handling conflict.

In a University of Ulster report of 1992 it was noted that less than one third of schools implemented EMU; teachers' perceptions differed and wider issues such as gender, human rights and ethics needed to be included. Nevertheless figures do show that contact between the two communities had increased through the EMU programmes. For example, contact between Catholics & Protestants in Primary Schools (age approx 5 to 12/14 years) had risen from 13% in 1987 to 42% in 1994. In the Secondary School system (12/14 years to age 18 years), contact had risen from 24% in 1987 to 59% in 1994. This report also noted that there was a lack of participation in the political process. This was deemed to be important at the time of the report, as the move away from violence solution to politics was underway in society. The EMU schools project, limited as it was, still had value as it acknowledged that diversity existed in the Northern Ireland society and it needed to be addressed, rather than ignored or glossed over, as heretofore.

Obstacles to participation

One of the main obstacles to getting young people involved in youth work initiatives was often simply that it was seen as rather 'worthy and uncool.' This is where the Peer Education process was particularly useful. Peer Education made the connection between attracting and respecting young people's issues and values and just being young. In the Glencree Centre it was often the case that young people involved in a one or two day Schools Peace Studies programme would cross over to the Youth Group. Then they might become interested in training as a Peer Educator themselves. They were also encouraged to take part in other programmes, or in designing and planning the annual Youth Summer School Programme, for example. Time was also a factor for young people, often overloaded in the mid teens with school exams and all the other diversions which apply to teenagers, getting people to commit time to weekends away, unless the combination of fun and development was right, could be difficult.

KEY ORGANISATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC

In the Republic, much of the youth work focus was on supporting young people in their own community. So for example, the Roscommon Youth Service 'provides information and assistance when needed, a friendly ear to listen.' It operates a drop in centre and offers practical advice on amongst other things, college prospects, health, passport applications, CV design, rates of pay etc. Leargas, another youth organisation 'is responsible for the delivery

of programmes, services and non formal education.’ It runs regional workshops, offers European youth exchange opportunities and also has a British /Irish exchange programme.

Youthreach is a ‘second chance’ education and training organisation. It is aimed at unemployed youth who may have left school early, or not obtained any school certificate or never transferred from the primary to the secondary school system at all. It is state funded and in an ‘out of school setting ‘offers support and encouragement to often disadvantaged youth. It is locally managed. It is seen as a key intervention strategic organisation with a holistic approach to educational training, and offers a safe environment which meets the young people at the place they are in at the time. One of its aims is to promote independence and active citizens who are socially included in the society. An evaluation has shown that a 75% success rate applies, as they progress into the labour market.

There are many other organisations active in the south including the YMCA, church related youth groups, projects to divert youth from possible involvement in crime (example Youth Project) and LUCCA a leadership training programme linked to the John Scotus School. The National Youth Council is an umbrella organisation with programmes in politics, arts, sports, citizenship, information technology, health, and international and intercultural arenas. They have also produced several resource packs.

The Glencree Centre for Reconciliation became very active again in the early 1990s. In March 1993 a short-lived, but important peace movement was born called Peace’93 in the wake of an IRA bombing in Warrington in England in which two young children were killed. I will return to this when I discuss the Tim Parry Scholarship. The Glencree Centre, having just had an evaluation and review, was poised to take up the intense interest in the Northern Ireland conflict which came about in the wake of this bombing and the political manoeuvres which were also taking place at that time. They began a series of programmes including schools and youth programmes, to which I have already referred.

In youth organisations in general there was a wish to have young people empowered, to see them develop and grow. In Northern Ireland, in addition to the application of the normal youth work criteria , a focus slowly developed on the conflict itself; its causes and resolution, the actors who could influence or change the conflict situation, and their own role in helping to bring about that change. Youth programmes , North and South of the border became more and more involved. Youth began to insist on being heard and to suggest new and better options to violent conflict and/or denial. The challenges and possibility for change will be illustrated in one such programme. The Tim Parry Scholarship which ran in this format for 5 years was designed to educate, challenge and to change perspectives. It still continues but the programme design has changed.

The Tim Parry Scholarship: An outline

History

In 1993 an IRA bomb was placed in a metal litter bin in a shopping street in Warrington one Saturday morning. It killed a two year old boy Jonathan Ball instantly, and critically injured Tim Parry, a twelve year old boy, who was exiting a shop having as he searched for a new football shirt. He died a few days later, when his parents had to turn off his life support machine. In the Republic of Ireland, the pain of the two families and their dignity and bewilderment struck a deep cord. It was a seminal moment in the Republic and meetings and

peace rallies and marches resulted. The world media descended on Dublin as the realisation grew that the majority of the people of the Republic of Ireland were totally opposed to the tactics of the IRA in bombing and killing others for some idea of a United Ireland. In Britain, the protests in Dublin were warmly responded too, and the Irish living there, were not seen as suspect in terms of the IRA, perhaps for one of the first times in all the years of the conflict.

The parents of Tim Parry began a journey in which they tried to understand what the Irish issue was all about, and why their son had to die for something they did not understand or relate too. Within a short time they had set up the Tim Parry Scholarship, as a way to break down stereotypes and create new understandings and to assist the young people of Warrington, many who had known Tim Parry, to meet other Irish and Northern young people and spend a week together in the Republic and Northern Ireland.

Selection of Participants

Schools in the three cities of Dublin, Belfast and Warrington were approached to take part in the scholarship. Participants were required to write an essay/letter expressing why they should be selected. On selection, a parents meeting was held to explain the process which the young people also attended. The Northern Ireland group were selected to reflect the two communities there. The organisations involved were the Peace People, Belfast, the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation, near Dublin and schools in Warrington under the Peace Centre umbrella.

Programme Design

The programme was designed to challenge all the participants' perceptions and preconceptions of the 'other.' The process began with workshops which enabled them to explore their own beliefs and prejudices, fears and misunderstandings. A safe space was created to enable all this to take place. It involved intense workshops with each other in the first instance, and then with very many representatives of the main structures of the state and key people in power. The group visited an RUC (police station) in Northern Ireland, an army barracks, community centres with young people like themselves. They had workshops with ex IRA men and ex UVF men, with other survivors or organisations; they visited historical sites and heard different accounts of histories, ancient and personal. They also met the President of the Republic and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as well as many other politicians from various parties. They were prepared before hand, enabled to ask any question they wished, and the encounters were also processed thereafter. It was an intense and hugely rewarding week, although difficult at times. The sister of Tim Parry, and Tim's father also did the week at different times. The week ended with a presentation by all the participants to Colin and Wendy Parry.

Outcomes

The outcomes were often profound and in Warrington today there is a Peace Centre for young people that continue the work of reconciliation and peace building in many areas of society, including schools and with victims and survivors of war, including today the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Individual evaluations, of the effect of the Scholarship which began in 1995 have not been written up but, anecdotally, many gained from this one week, when they were in their middle teens. Mark's story is one such example.

Mark's Story

Mark grew up in a very working class nationalist area. He was handsome, bright eyed, warm, funny and very intelligent. As a participant in the Tim Parry Scholarship he was noticeable for his clear and strong views, his fearlessness in standing against the crowd, as he justified the violent war of the IRA. Although such opinions were difficult for some to hear, such was the charisma of the boy, that, the others were able to separate the person from his ideology and he was very popular. As Programme Director, I had been involved in designing and organising the programme and was also facilitating all the workshops and was with the group at all times.

The day we left for Belfast, Mark, sat with me for a while on the bus. We talked and laughed for a while then, looking at me very seriously, he told me that he knew his fate was 'to be a dead hero' for his country. He was telling me that he would be joining the IRA. We talked at some length and at many different times over the week as I suggested to him that he might re-consider that option and 'become a live hero' for his community and country. The week brought many challenges for him; meeting the police whom he saw as partisan and anti his community; talking with British soldiers whom he felt should not be on his native soil, hearing an ex IRA man talk about the realities of such a life, of the 18 years he had spent in prison, of the many people he had seen die. It was a difficult week in many ways for him. On the last night of the Scholarship, Mark asked me to read a prose poem which he had written, explaining the effect the week had had on him. I was moved to tears when I read it, and I told Wendy Parry about the journey the boy had made. He read the poem to the group, explaining that he had now, after the week, resolved to become a 'live hero for his community and his country.' Wendy who was deeply touched asked him if she might have a copy of this poem, to which Mark replied, 'Wendy, you can have the original.'

Today this poem is framed on the wall of the Peace Centre in Warrington. The young man, Mark is now a lawyer. The terrible sadness is that it was possibly someone just like him who planted the bomb that fateful Saturday in Warrington which killed Tim Parry and Jonathan Ball, in the first place.

Post Conflict

Northern Ireland, after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, is rebuilding itself. The process of healing and reconciliation goes on and after a thirty year conflict; this process will take much time and effort and may falter from time to time. Nevertheless, Stormont is operational with a power sharing executive in place. Reforms in many of the organs of state are also ongoing and working well. The relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is positive as it is between the Republic and the United Kingdom.

In terms of youth work then, whereas some of the usual cross community and international work continues, a certain emphasis on building new visions of citizenship is evident. A report entitled 'A Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work in Northern Ireland 2005/2008' has as a mission the 'development, rights and participation of four to twenty-five year olds'. As before the emphasis is on 'development' with the encouragement of volunteers and with a series of constructive planned programmes which will be continuously monitored and evaluated. Citizenship in terms of not just politics, and respect for law is being developed and there is also encouragement becoming evident for 'independent thought' which can bring about 'reflective debate.' The notion of Active Citizenship is also being fostered, encouraging participation in the societal process. Participation is seen as the 'key' to the

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individual and collective decision making process. The emphasis in citizenship is broadening out from the usual sectional interest's model to one which reflects 'communities of interests'. The role of the Youth Worker is also being more clearly examined and defined.

In Northern Ireland 36% of the population is under 25 years old and this report suggests that 75% will have come in contact with some branch of the youth services by the age of 25 years. The different development needs of the three age bands, 4 to 10 year, 10-16 years, 16 to 25 years is also recognised as is the reality of rights. Strategies for the more transient and vulnerable young people are also recognised. Underpinning the changes required in youth work is the need to 'start with the reality of their lives' which includes identifying exclusion and causes, poverty, the nature of a divided society and discrimination. Youth work has to be responsive to these realities and be adaptable and specific and flexible.

The Education and Library Boards has a remit to ensure adequate facilities and services are provided while the Youth Service NI supports 'and encourages children and young people to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens.' The Youth Service includes all organisations and projects, which aim at the personal development of young people. As part of this overall aim there is a Curriculum Development Unit also. There is an awareness also, that the school system has a large responsibility in character and identity formation. Silvia Massano of the University of Ulster 'states in the paper entitled' Youth Citizenship & Education: Policies in Northern Ireland' that the influx of EU nationals is changing the demographic makeup of the island as the economy draws in more and more people.

New Initiative

Finally an example of an organisation in Northern Ireland with a commitment to 'Building Democratic Communities Together', called Public Achievement. It began in 1999 after a visit to the University of Minnesota by civic educators from Northern Ireland. As citizenship education began in schools post the Good Friday Agreement, building on the EMU programmes which had gone before, the Public Achievement organisation became involved in schools as well as in the communities. One of the critical focus points of the organisation is to give young people the opportunity to get practical experience in directing and implementing their own work 'around real and important issues.' They are also encouraged to challenge perspectives, and 'the social and political division in their society,' to develop non violent strategies as a conflict response and to focus on societal issues and campaign for and against them.

FUNDING

A constant refrain with Youth Organisation is that of Funding. Programmes are often 'pilots' or run out of funds after a short time. There is endless time and red tape involved in making applications and often the funders write the script for the programmes with little reference to the needs of the organisations on the ground. Another issue is that organisations often have overlapping aims and objectives and compete against each other for funds.

All organisations in the area of Peace and Conflict understandably focus on survival. This is especially true in the post conflict period when the problems are all deemed to be solved. This is a very short sighted approach, as much healing and re building can only take place after the guns have stopped. Nevertheless it is a reality.

EVALUATION

Organisations in the field, focused as they are on the conflict and building trust and relationships, often neglect the long term evaluation of the programmes which have gone before. This is very understandable too, as the pressure is conflict driven. The result however is a paucity of recorded programmes, responses and results, generally, although short term evaluations have happened. Nevertheless, many understandings and insights gained from programmes have been lost and cannot be used and adapted by others in their own contexts. Funding for such evaluations is hard to obtain also. Finally, perhaps linked to the previous point, an audit of organisations, in this case youth focused, might be useful every five or ten years, to see if some could be either consolidate or be encouraged to change direction.

Conclusion

Youth Work has come a long way from the early tentative initiatives of the mid 1880s to the present day. That said, there was a basic commonality of purpose which had something to do with the improvement of and education of the young, which might lead to a better society at some level. This core value is still valid.

In a conflict zone, as in Northern Ireland, another dimension gets added as the young, who have not created the situation, react and respond. It is hardly any surprise that young men (not exclusively but predominantly), first instinctive reactions is to fight the 'other'. They are often encouraged in this by older and supposedly wiser people in the community. This reinforces the 'rightness' of the fight response.

In addition, young people, as they begin the separation process from parents, crave a 'peer group' and have a need to belong. The foregoing plays into the hands of those who espouse the violent response and they use it to good effect. The attraction of this is often seriously underestimated in my view. This was the case in Northern Ireland where young boys of fifteen and sixteen years were brought into paramilitary organisations. They were given increasing responsibilities, from getting a secret message from one person to another; to carrying a gun, to driving a car; to placing a bomb in a bar or restaurant, to shooting someone. They were preyed on, while being reassured that they were soldiers, heroes, and part of something very important. Suicide bombers are one and the same today.

The challenge for youth work in a conflict zone is to undermine this model, to suggest another way, a slower less instantly visible way of waging peace, but worth the effort in the longer term. Change can and does happen, if the circumstances are right as was the case with Mark.

Organisations need to be funded to encourage this way of thinking before, during and post conflict. Schools have a major role here also. It is critical to build up the notion of citizenship, of community, that involves and respects youth with their ideas and enthusiasm. Despite all the obstacles, and given time, resources and imagination, well thought out, planned and organised youth focused programmes, even in a conflict zone, can bring rich rewards. To conclude and in a spirit of optimism, I quote a Northern Irish Nobel Literature Laureate when he says;

History says, don't hope

On this side of the grave

But then once in a lifetime
The longed for tidal wave
Of Justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.
So hope for a sea change
On the far side of revenge
Believe that another shore
Is reachable from here.

(The Cure of Troy P77)

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Other

Personal Experience

as

Founder member of Peace '93, anti violence movement in the wake of the Warrington bombing by the IRA, in which two children died.

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