

SEARCH

South East Antrim Resourcing from Conflict to Hope



Politicians and community activists at the SEARCH Celebration Launch (see page 3)

Understanding Peace building

Adree Wallace, Community Development Officer,
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Transforming protracted conflict situations is not simply a matter of giving money to local community groups and demanding instant change.

Communities must provide comprehensive approaches, emphasising socio-economic, psychological and spiritual processes of transformation if they are to sustain their future visions.

Despite the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, uncertainties remain about post-conflict Northern Ireland and the fragile social structures emerging after that period to deal with legacies of the past.

Decades of socio-economic problems such as poverty, deprivation, social exclusion, sectarianism and intolerance are still being experienced in many local working class communities, across all divides.

Sectarianism and intolerance are caused by varied and complex factors, but many problems have emanated from patterns of segregation in society, mistrust between communities, marginalisation and a lack of citizen participation in civil networks.

Geographically, South East Antrim covers almost one fifth of Northern Ireland, hosting many of its most deprived areas, suffering violence and alienation in the past.

Research shows that durable peace building requires acknowledgement that conflict resolution programmes and economic development initiatives are inextricably linked.

Many of the target community believe they have not experienced a proportionate dividend from the peace process.

Therefore the success of The SEARCH Project is paramount in concluding the transformation journey for communities in South and East Antrim, engaging with politically motivated ex-prisoners and ex-combatants in a process to contribute to the departure of the South East Antrim Ulster Defence Association.

The Project's key objectives are:

- Development of the capacity and contribution of politically motivated ex-prisoners and ex-combatants
- Work on conflict transformation and peace building
- Work on social change leadership

A comprehensive programme of work will be delivered over the period between February 2011 and September 2012, with administrative and financial management support from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

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The privilege of building peace

Tommy Kirkham, SEARCH Project Co-ordinator



It is a privilege to Co-ordinate the SEARCH Project, established to assist around 2,000 ex-combatants and political ex-prisoners, aligned to the South East Antrim UDA, in transforming their lives and embedding peace.

Four years of engagement, relationship building and intra-community connections have led to the establishment of the Project, with the assistance of the South and East Antrim Community Federation and four experienced outreach workers are now actively working across the area.

Action plans are in place to direct activities and the Project is guided by an advisory panel of eminent representatives from the political, community, statutory and religious spheres.

It is my responsibility to ensure these action plans are delivered, in conjunction with staff from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, who provide development support and assistance with financial management.

Already, two major conferences have been attended by around 700 delegates and the Project's celebration launch at Stormont in September 2011, hosted by Danny Kinahan MLA, attracted widespread political and media interest.

Scepticism and cynicism is reducing as activities on the ground are delivering results and partnerships have already been established that run far beyond initial expectations.

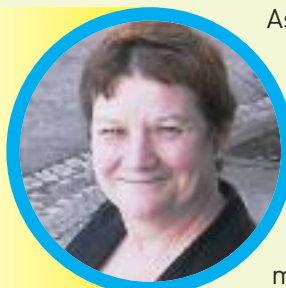
Financial support for the Project from the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) has been a very welcome departure and this funding will be used as a key to unlock new avenues for sustainability.

Already, plans are in place to build a strong social economy in the area, creating an atmosphere of self-help and self-sufficiency.

Our mission is clear and our goals are achievable and those engaged in the SEARCH Project believe transforming the South and East Antrim area from conflict to community development will provide benefits for generations to come.

Securing a stable future

Dr. Avila Kilmurray



As a peace-building organisation working locally for 32 years, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland believes it is important to develop inclusive approaches to peace building and conflict transformation, working with the most marginalised groups.

For this reason, the SEARCH Project is engaging with Loyalist groups in South and East Antrim.

It has been a long journey for those interested in creating a peaceful and stable future in the area and since February 2011, the SEARCH Project has made great strides at promoting conflict transformation.

Supported with funding from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the Project is engaging with thousands of political ex-prisoners, ex-combatants and their families to build a new future based on community development, political engagement and social justice.

Former political prisoners and combatants can play an enormous part in securing a stable future and many have already made incredible impressions on the peace process and wider society in general.

However, this is a task that needs to be addressed on a day to day basis and is not without its challenges.

Our Foundation recognises this and with help from various sources, not least those who sit on the Advisory Panel of the Project, we will continue to support those in South and East Antrim who are committed to peace building and conflict transformation.

Reducing marginalisation, increasing social inclusion and encouraging community dialogue is in everyone's interest and when this is combined with good, grass roots community action, the search for peace is made easier.

Celebration launch a positive success

A raft of politicians, community development activists, church figures and representatives from the Police attended the SEARCH celebration launch at Stormont on Monday, September 12.

Ulster Unionist MLA Danny Kinihan, whose constituency sits within the area covered by the SEARCH Project, hosted the packed event in the Long Gallery.

Other MLA's, including the DUP's Paula Bradley, Sammy Douglas, Paul Girvan and David Hilditch also attended.

The SDLP's leadership candidate Conall McDevitt MLA was in attendance, while Michael Culbert and Joe Doherty, representatives of the Republic political prisoner group Coiste Na Iarchimi, were also there.

Deputy Mayor of Newtownabbey Victor Robinson was accompanied by Council Chief Executive Jacqui Dixon, while Larne Borough Council was represented by Catherine Black

The SEARCH Project aims to improve the lives of people living in the area, with work plans being rolled out across South and East Antrim.

New staff are now on the ground, helping with community needs around the catchment area, which stretches from Whitewell in Belfast, north to Larne and Ballymena and west as far as Antrim.

Since February 2011, the SEARCH team has been instrumental in organising positive activities, including four festivals celebrating Ulster Scots culture, while eight community festivals were held over the period of the Twelfth.

Others involved in the programme recently completed a cross-border exchange in Dublin, where relationships were analysed and discussed.

A multitude of training programmes have been offered and delivered, following a detailed skills and needs analysis across South and East Antrim, to help increase employability and the future prospects for participants.

Two new community groups have also been established, to give local people a structured voice and enjoyable activities like Teddy Bears Picnics, an archery project and even cross community boxing competitions prove that despite its short lifespan, the SEARCH Project already has plenty to celebrate!



South Antrim MLA Danny Kinihan, host of the SEARCH Celebration Launch at the Long Gallery in Stormont.



Adree Wallace (left) and Tommy Kirkham (right) are joined by North Belfast MLA Paula Bradley at the SEARCH Launch at Stormont.

A passion for progress

Stephen Ross, Outreach Worker, Newtownabbey



Moving communities from a conflict situation to peaceful progress is a major focus for my work, which covers the Graymount, Whitewell, Rathcoole, Rathfern, Monkstown and Glengormley areas.

Some of these places are among the most socially disadvantaged in Northern Ireland, containing many of the most excluded and marginalised in our society.

Four interfaces dissect the area and hard work and dedication from local representatives have helped keep many of these areas stable and quiet.

Problems have arisen in areas where statutory agencies and elected representatives have refused to engage in a meaningful way, preferring to let community activists pick up the pieces after trouble occurs, rather than favouring proactive engagement to prevent violence.

Working with young people

My attendance at interfaces has allowed me to identify a number of key influencers among Protestant young males and the SEARCH Project has encouraged them to engage with alternative projects.

Workshops have been held to identify needs and one of the biggest successes to date is the establishment of a Young Men's Group in Glengormley.

14-25 year old men are notoriously hard to reach in many communities and these are the most likely to feel excluded from agencies like the Police and society in general.

The Glengormley group had bonded through interface violence and the SEARCH Project intervened to establish a working group to look at issues around identity, self esteem and culture.

Assistance was given to help some members join a local boxing club, where they work on aspects of their physical health, learn about the dangers of substance abuse and are encouraged to release aggression in a safe environment.

This will hopefully have as positive an effect on the mental health of these young men as it had on the interface area they reside in – as this group has developed and flourished, interface violence has reduced.

It has hoped a permanent base will be found to allow a home for their activities.



SEARCH worker Stevie Ross, with Antrim community worker Darren Smyth and Ballymena community worker Mark Rainey.

Servicing the community for health and wealth

Philip Mannis, Outreach Worker, Carrickfergus and Greenisland



Providing a service for over 600 ex-combatants, ex-political prisoners and their families in the Glenfield, Castlemara, Sunnylands, Woodburn, Eden and Greenisland estates may seem like a daunting task.

However, the position of the SEARCH Project has been made easier due to previous engagement in the local community and I bring a decade of experience of working in these areas to my new role with the Project.

Priority was given to getting information on the Project to the local ex-combatant and political ex-prisoner population and around 8 initial weeks were spent meeting and informing people of its aims and objectives.

As in other areas, a special survey helped inform our action planning and around 70% of those asked to participate responded with their views.

A positive development from this was that many people were identified to play a role as volunteers and training opportunities were found for many others.

Re-imaging

In Carrickfergus, two paramilitary murals have been replaced in the Glenfield and Woodburns estates, after a painstaking consultation programme with key influencers in these areas.

Local schools, youth groups and residents were asked for ideas for new murals and the final plans depicted Colonel Edward Sanderson's Ulster Defence Union, formed in 1893, which would have obvious resonances with the modern Ulster Defence Association.

Health and wellbeing

Carrickfergus has had a major focus on Health & Wellbeing, with the help of the Northern Health & Social Care Trusts and Public Health Agency.

A bank of knowledge and information has been built with health professionals and a community nurse now operates from our base at the Glenfield Community Association, which has proved to be an incredible success.

It would be beneficial to have this service delivered in other areas of South and East Antrim and the Project will now attempt to establish a community dentistry service as well.



New images adorn old walls as paramilitary murals change in Carrickfergus.

SEARCHing far and wide

Willie Cameron, Outreach Worker, Larne, Ballycarry, Whitehead



Larne, Ballycarry and Whitehead are relatively settled areas in relation to age and confidence.

The SEARCH Project works closely with statutory agencies like the PSNI, building on work that has been ongoing for some time.

A special research project, with a distinctly designed questionnaire, has helped inform work with our client base, which even stretches beyond the shores of South and East Antrim, to places like Newtownards and areas of Scotland, including Glasgow, Edinburgh and Fife.

It is very important to include individuals from these areas, as their inclusion provides a positive ripple on the entire process.

Unemployment among young men in our client base is a particular problem and training programmes have been made available to help solve this pressing problem.

Opportunities for individuals to avail of courses and programmes aimed at giving them skills and abilities to compete in the jobs market will continue to be identified.

Protocols

In terms of local development, protocols have been created around bonfires, flags and murals to embed best practice and to ensure that conflict transformation has a positive, visible bearing on the areas the project serves. Intra-community links have been established to keep a steady flow of information at ground level and both the Police and Councils have felt the benefit of reduced problems during the marching season as a result of building good relationships.

With the transformation process effectively moving people away from paramilitary activity, there has been an increase in crime within many loyalist areas but the position of the SEARCH Project on crime is categorically clear – criminals and their activities are a matter for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

It has been very encouraging to see the engagement the PSNI has made in the South and East Antrim area, both in terms of on the ground activity and the fact that two senior officers sit on the Advisory Panel of the SEARCH Project.

This can only make the lives of people in Larne, Ballycarry and Whitehead safer and more settled in the medium and longer term and may even provide a model for other areas to clone.



SEARCH Worker Willie Cameron (right), with Larne Borough Council Good Relations Officer Catherine Black, and Noel Rogan and Colin Skinner from the PSNI.

Scoping the challenges

Bobby Rice, Outreach Worker, Ballyclare, Antrim and Ballymena



Since taking up post, several distinct challenges have presented themselves in the areas where my work impacts.

Working across three different council districts, each of which has its own set of policies, throws up particular problems but a key marker has been the inexperience of community organisations, across the area, in identifying and accessing funding for positive community activities.

It is a major aim of the SEARCH Project to enhance the skills of groups in accessing support and a special presentation has been developed to build capacity and encourage positive engagement with councils and other funders.

Outreach

In terms of outreach to the SEARCH Project client base, political ex-prisoners, ex combatants and members of their families have been encouraged to become more involved in their communities and to access personal development and vocational courses to help them compete in the employment market, which is, of course, currently fairly depressed.

Council officers and statutory bodies must recognise that they have an important role to play in making their services known to the communities they serve and SEARCH Project workers will continue to monitor the success of groups and individuals accessing assistance as the Project progresses. Bringing peace to the South and East Antrim area has been a long road to travel and I have been at the forefront in sowing the seeds for peace in the area.

As a voluntary worker with 15 years experience, I have previously worked with the Prisoners Aid Networking Group and was a key contact between the International Monitoring Commission, coinciding with the parallel work on the decommissioning of weapons others were engaged in.

As peace takes root, I will continue to look for opportunities in the areas I represent for conflict transformation to flourish and for economic development to be built and I will continue to bring all my experience to bear in making the Ballyclare, Antrim and Ballymena areas safer for people to live and work.

Below: SEARCH Community Development Officer Adree Wallace (left), with Danny Kinahan MLA, Cllr Victor Robinson, Deputy Lord Mayor of Newtownabbey, Inspector Martin Ruddy from Ballyclare PSNI and Tommy Kirkham, SEARCH Project Co-Ordinator (right) at the SEARCH launch at Stormont.



Expert advice and guidance

It's not often a community based initiative has the luxury of expert advice and guidance immediately to hand.

For the SEARCH Project though, that's exactly what is available, as a top class panel of experts, comprising senior community activists, politicians, statutory and council representatives, members of the police service, academics and religious figures.

Chaired by Dr. Avila Kilmurray from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, the Panel gives the Project strategic direction and advice, with regular meetings

Advisory Panel for the SEARCH Project:

Mr Campbell Dixon	Retired, Newtownabbey District Policing Partnership
Ms Paula Bradley	MLA for North Belfast
Mr Sean Brennan	Intercomm Belfast
Mr Jeff Maxwell	NIACRO
Mr Jackie Hewitt	Farset International
Ms Adree Wallace	Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
Ms Monina O'Prey	Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
Ms Avila Kilmurray	Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
Mr Neil Jarman	Institute for Conflict Research
Ms Majella McAllister	Newtownabbey Borough Council
Rev Gabrielle Farquhar	Ballycarry Presbyterian Church
Mr Noel Rogan	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mr Colin Skinner	Police Service of Northern Ireland



SEARCH Advisory panel members, clockwise from top: Jackie Hewitt, Campbell Dixon, Rev. Gabrielle Farquhar, Tommy Kirkham, Avila Kilmurray and Colin Skinner.



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