

Communities In Transition

Area: East Belfast

Theme: Restorative Practice

Date: 14/1/2019

Number of attendee's: 11

1. Proposed interventions discussed to address the issues identified in Phase 1 fieldwork?

Despite acknowledging a general interest in restorative practice and suggesting it should have an expanded role in their community, participants found it hard to be specific about what exactly this should entail moving forward.

Suggestions ranged from the impractical (a physical centre of excellence for restorative practice) to the aspirational (better quality restorative practice). There was a general sense that something should be done, but little specificity regarding how this should be achieved.

2. Comments on current community capacity to address issues identified?

There was a lengthy conversation regarding the value of restorative orientated groups obtaining accreditation. For some participants, accreditation was imperative and practices carried out by those without it lacked accountability. It was also suggested that there was significant value in accredited groups being able to share information with one another and with relevant statutory bodies. For others there was a little more flexibility in their attitude – they indicated that it was at least as important that the groups/individuals involved be local (this allowed the associated practices to appear 'legitimate' within the community).

3. Outcomes that participants suggested these interventions would achieve?

There was a mixed reaction to the suggestion that there needed to be a physical centre of excellence for restorative practice. Some felt this was a good idea, as one building that housed all the local restorative groups and other relevant agencies could deliver a more holistic response to the multiple issues of deprivation restorative organisations active in the area are currently encountering.

Given the existing financial resources available from this programme, facilitators asked participants how this type of synergy could be achieved without a physical site, but there was no comprehensive or positive response – there was minimal interest in extra forums and opportunities for networking.

4. How did participants suggest we will know if these projects/interventions have succeeded? (indicators/measures)

Given the lack of detail offered regarding prospective programmes, there was limited insight into how people felt future initiatives should be monitored. Some participants did feel an associated community forum should be put in place, but others indicated that they struggled to attend the large volume of forums already active across the community.

5. Target beneficiaries/participants of the suggested interventions?

Long-term practitioners explained that the issues they are now dealing with are more complex than ever before – this was attributed to the combination of the levels of alcohol/drug addiction and range of mental health issues prevalent across the community. It was stressed that any initiatives emerging from the programme should recognise the urgent need to deal with these issues.

6. How did participants suggest these projects/interventions will build the capacity/capability in the community?

Participants felt that where people encounter future restorative practice initiatives they must be given support to find improved pathways, especially where they are suffering from addiction, debt and/or mental health problems.

7. How did participants suggest these projects/interventions will support the overall objectives of the Tackling Paramilitarism Executive Action Plan...?

a. Paramilitarism has no place.

Participants felt that by streamlining high quality, restorative practice residents will feel they have viable local alternatives to paramilitary policing (in the absence of their willingness to contact the PSNI).

b. Citizens and communities feel safe and confident.

Participants felt that accountable, community-led responses to local issues was an important mechanism in 'ordinary residents' feeling like they have control in their area.

c. The public support and have increased confidence in the justice system.

Participants acknowledged concerns about the formal justice system and suggested restorative practice should be in place to complement this and allow the community to feel a sense of ownership over resolving issues in the absence of confidence in the justice system.

d. Support is available for those who wish to move away from paramilitary activity and structures.

It was suggested that high quality restorative justice practice should seek to support young men/women at risk of becoming involved in paramilitary organisations. Where these individuals encounter restorative practice, serious effort should be given to ensure they receive appropriate support moving forward.

8. Any dependencies identified by participants?

n/a

9. Any risks identified by participants?

Continued concern about the absence of known paramilitaries/associated community groups - questions regarding how the programme will end paramilitary activity if the organisations are not engaging and concerns that paramilitaries might 'deliberately scupper' projects emerging from the programme.

10. Any other comments made by participants?

Participants wanted on-going positive work to receive at least as much support as any new initiatives (especially as many current projects active in the area are within 12 months of their funding coming to an end).

Concerns about the lag between last year's consultation and these sessions - feelings that goodwill toward programme was gone. Other complaints about communication in general.

11. Is a further follow-up workshop required? Please provide details.

No. Both of the facilitators be unsure how they could illicit a different response in a further session.