

## **Communities In Transition**

### **Participatory Design Process – Reporting Template**

Please complete this report following each participatory design session (i.e. one per session) to record the key of the discussion. Please use the sections below to structure the report. If any area was not covered during the discussion, please note that in the relevant section.

Please return the completed report to [cit@cooperationireland.org](mailto:cit@cooperationireland.org) within one week of each participatory design session.

*Area: Carrick/Larne*

*Theme: Personal Transition*

*Date: 31/01/19*

*Number of attendee's: 6*

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

- Participants noted that some interventions and programmes around the re-imagining of murals had been successfully implemented within both Carrick and Larne (and involving ex-combatants/ex-prisoners). However, many murals remained under the auspices of the paramilitaries and were re-painted back over displaying paramilitary messages for commemorative events or in response to macro-level political actions.
- The primary focus for attendees was on early intervention/education programmes with young people (aged 11+ in school and community settings) who are 'vulnerable' to being recruited by paramilitary organisations. This could involve arts/drama on the reality of 'life in a gang', or through hearing the stories of those who have been personally impacted upon by addiction/mental health/paramilitarism. Preference was given where possible for such stories to be local. This focus on prevention work (rather than assistance for those already in organisations) was discussed in the context of the lack of a viable 'way out' of one of the main paramilitary organisations in the South-East Antrim area which, unlike the other main loyalist organisations, does not tend to have a 'public face' and commitment to organisational transition at present.
- It was also felt that further resourcing could be provided to support existing mental health/drug and alcohol addiction/counselling/debt management services in the area. Building capacity and skills among local residents and local organisations to sustain themselves was believed to be a much more sustainable approach in the longer-term (than bringing in external organisations with little links in to local communities. If this was to be the

case, then participants favoured consortia approaches which would include local organisations alongside external expertise).

- Participants were also in favour of 'money management' life skills courses for young people, particularly around the area of budgeting – as this was felt to be one of the reasons how some young people get in to debt and subsequently end up owing paramilitary organisations money.

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

- Current community capacity to address the issues identified is extremely low and participants expressed a strong desire that this overall programme prioritised community development to build community capacity as a critical way to then address the issues identified under the other themes, including personal transition.

## **3. Outcomes that participants suggested these interventions would achieve?**

- Greater awareness of the link between using drugs and the role of paramilitaries – in terms of building a debt and perhaps being forced to join an organisation as a consequence. This 'pathway' from drugs, to addiction, to debt, to paramilitaries 'calling to the house' and possibly receiving a beating/being shot, was believed to be important for young people in the B4 areas to be aware of.
- Less young people coming to the attention of paramilitaries and ultimately being targeted for recruitment into those criminal organisations.
- By responding to the community need in relation to building community capacity through community development work, a long-term outcome would be to create sustainable resources and capacity within the community that they would make the community more resilient to addressing the many other issues identified across both research phases of the Communities in Transition project.

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

- Fewer members of paramilitary organisations
- Fewer visible manifestations of paramilitarism (flags, murals, emblems etc)
- More individuals and young people availing of support services (for addiction, debt management etc.).

## **5. Target beneficiaries/participants of the suggested interventions?**

- Young people
- Young people 'vulnerable' to developing an addiction and possibly a paramilitary related debt
- Families of young people – through increased awareness of drugs/addiction/debt impact and relation to paramilitarism

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

- Participants felt that interventions under this theme of 'personal transition' would not have a realistic prospect of success given the ongoing paramilitary activity in the area and the lack of community infrastructure to support any individuals seeking to transition. However, it must be noted that no ex-combatants or representatives of organisations that work with ex-prisoners were in attendance.

**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.**
  - b. Citizens and communities feel safe and confident.**
  - c. The public support and have increased confidence in the justice system.**
  - d. Support is available for those who wish to move away from paramilitary activity and structures.**
- All participants felt that this theme is not realistically achievable within the areas of Carrick and Larne at this time. Given the ongoing paramilitary feud and high-levels of tensions and paramilitary activity, participants pointed to the belief that practically speaking it is not realistic for individual members to be able to transition from paramilitary organisations at this time. Participants pointed to the need to focus on community development work to establish foundations and principles of resilience within the community that would at a later point help engender conditions necessary for combatants wanting to transition to be able to be supported to do so by and within the community.

**8. Any dependencies identified by participants?**

- The ongoing paramilitary feud and the community tension and anxiety stemming from that needs to be addressed.
- The paramilitaries need to be tackled by the police and the criminal justice system.
- The lack of community development work in the area is evident and participants highlighted community development, health and wellbeing and interventions with young people as the critical themes for both Carrick and Larne.

**9. Any risks identified by participants?**

- Intervention programmes could be viewed by active paramilitaries as a means of providing societal legitimacy and also a way of gathering public money. Participants stated that previous funded interventions involving combatants

allegedly transitioning had merely served to contribute to enhancing the coercive control of active/current paramilitaries.

#### **10. Any other comments made by participants?**

- A participant was concerned that this project would provide a 'silver spoon' for paramilitaries on the basis of them claiming to be transitioning and would rather see provision focused and supported for interventions for young people and the wider mental health of the community as a whole rather than interventions solely being available for combatants. This wider community approach to transition tended to be the general focus of the evening's discussion.
- In relation to potential intergenerational work between ex-combatants and young people 'vulnerable' to coercion by paramilitaries, participants believed that within Loyalist communities, ex-combatants don't have enough influence or connection with young people and it is the current paramilitary figures that hold that power and influence. Consequently, there was little appetite for intergenerational work.
- A participant explained how they would prefer to focus on targeting interventions with young people to stop them from being recruited by paramilitaries rather than taking the 'risk; that a current paramilitary may be genuine about wanting to transition.
- Participants stated that paramilitary actions in 'usurping control' of funded projects and community groups historically has stymied community development in the area. However, the re-establishment of small community groups that are, at present, seen to be free from paramilitary influence was discussed and identified as needing to be supported.
- A participant, whilst noting the physical and mental barriers facing combatants wanting to transition, maintained that given the control and power over members exhibited by armed groups it just wasn't realistic that a member of that organisation would be 'allowed' to leave. It is this extension of a 'poverty of hope' within the area that makes it, from the participant's point of view, impossible for individuals to envisage a pathway to transition.
- Participants believed that the 'Troubles' context of ex-combatants wasn't replicated in Carrick and Larne as it was in other areas under the B4 initiative. Participants believe the paramilitaries in the areas of Carrick and Larne had usurped the historic paramilitary titles but were simply 'out-and-out gangsters' running 'criminal gangs'.

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

No follow-up workshop required. This theme was not identified as a priority issue for this area by participants. The themes of community development and health and well-being (addiction/mental health/debt management) are the most significant themes within Carrick and Larne.