

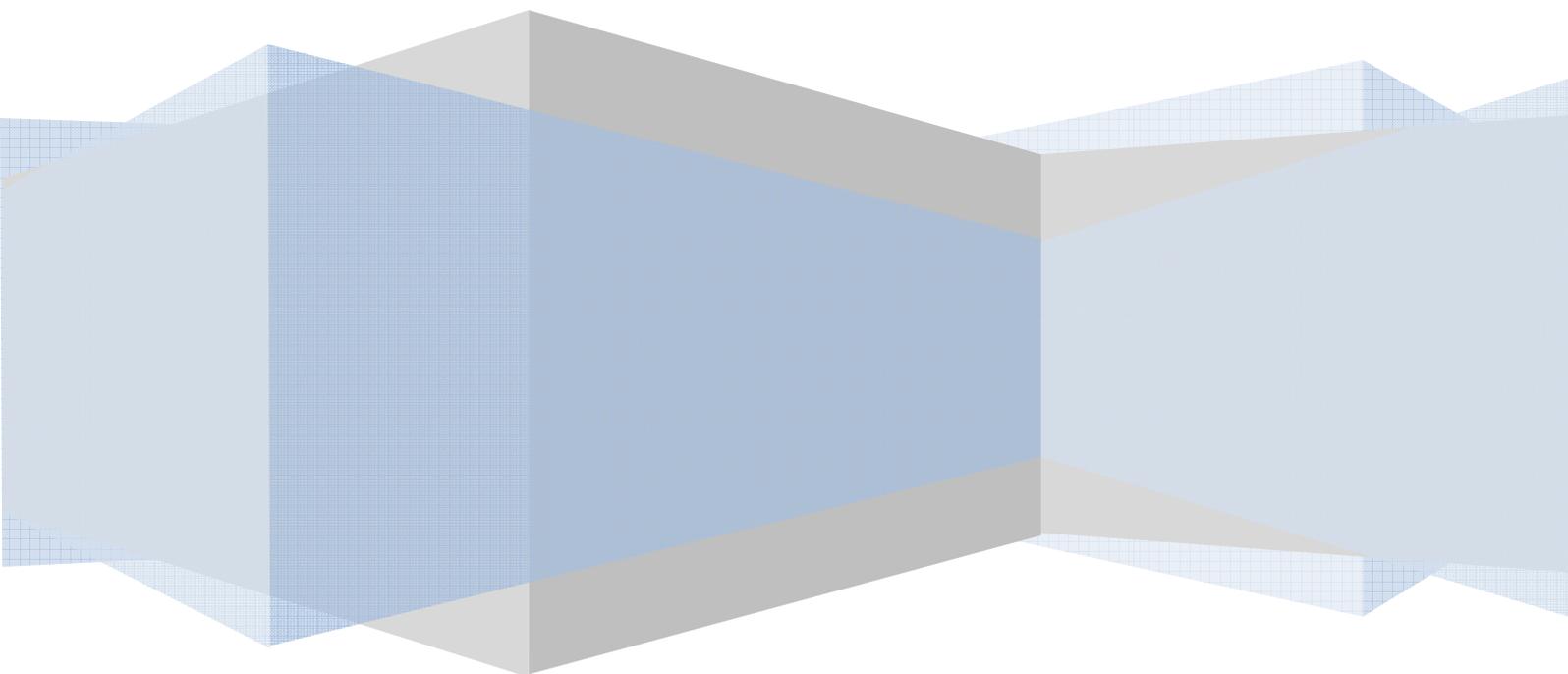


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Reviewing a Peace II-Funded Project:

Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium

February 2012-September 2014



Background & Introduction

Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium was set up in April 2007 with the aim to assist local conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts that had begun through the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the following peace process by supporting and assisting those communities that had been impacted on most by the conflict – Belfast’s interface areas and communities.

Extensive cross-community dialogue preceded the set up of BCRC which then led to the formation of a partnership between Falls Community Council, Intercomm, Charter NI and EPIC. BCRC was established on the basis that interface communities across the societal divide have a range of issues and concerns in common and that a joint approach to dealing with these issues would be of benefit to those residents living at the coal face throughout the city of Belfast.

The project’s overall aim is to sustain a citywide cross-community partnership which works to empower interface communities to develop the tools and resources to manage and address conflict transformation within their local areas and across Belfast, underpinned by a community development ethos. To achieve this aim, the project is focussed on two parallel processes:

- 1) To provide an integrated response to tensions at interfaces and to prevent outbreaks of violence through fostering and expanding cross-community strategic alliances.
- 2) To enhance within interface communities conflict resolution skills, local leadership capacity, democratic involvement, and reconciliation efforts and to share future work on the legacy of the conflict and social problems faced by these communities.

The work of BCRC has been supported through a series of EU funding streams, beginning with Peace II during April 2007- November 2008 and two subsequent Peace III funding programmes November 2008-September 2014. In addition to its team of 8 staff, its Partner Organisations and Steering Group, the project has also been supported by its Local/Key Area Contact volunteers throughout the city.

Since the project was set up in April 2007, its activities have focused on a number of key themes and areas including Intercommunity Engagements, Practitioner Work & Initiatives, Shared History & Dealing with the Past, Research Projects & Policy, Training & Capacity Building and International Activities.

Below are some examples of events and activities organised by BCRC during the latest Peace III funding programme, February 2012-September 2014.

BCRC Programme of Activities, Feb. 2012-Sep. 2014

This funding period has seen BCRC achieve a wide range of activities, all within the remit of its 6 Key Objectives:

- 1) To provide a community connections programme which facilitates engagement, empowerment & regeneration of Belfast's interface communities in partnership with young people, local residents & community groups.
- 2) To develop and deliver a community connections leadership / capacity building / programme targeting youth, community and women leaders from interface communities.
- 3) To support the work provided through the Key Area Contacts by developing local and citywide structures and feeding in to other conflict management initiatives.
- 4) To explore the impact and legacy of the conflict through a programme of learning and discussion aimed at activists and residents in interface communities.
- 5) To promote reciprocal learning in the field of conflict resolution/transformation nationally and internationally.
- 6) To ensure project sustainability and cohesion.

As per the end of August, the project has engaged 341 individual attendees/participants through a range of events and activities. Out of these 177 are male and 153 female. A total of 18 events have been organised as well as 13 training and capacity building opportunities.

Intercommunity Engagements

As noted in the previous Project Review Report, covering the period 2008-2011, BCRC has continued to organise events and activities to highlight and address issues of concern to interface communities and workers. These have included seminars, presentations, focus groups, public meetings, roundtables and conferences. A few examples include:

- *Police Accountability – Failure Has Consequences: A Case Study of the Marikana Commission, South Africa*, September 2014 at Intercomm
- *International Perspectives on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation*, December 2013 at Malone Lodge
- *Gender & Dealing with the Past: UN Resolution 1325*, June 2014 at Grosvenor House
- *We Were There*: Film Screening and Discussion, June 2014 at the MAC
- Public Meeting re: the York Street Interchange, organised in conjunction with Forum for an Alternative Belfast at Groundwork NI, February 2014
- *Building Sustainable Communities: Challenges & Opportunities*, June 2013 at Radisson Hotel
- North, East and West Belfast Interface Survey Focus Groups, February 2013
- Gender research follow-up seminar, November 2012 at the MAC
- *Community Safety: A Decade of Development, Delivery, Challenge and Change in Northern Ireland* at Belfast City Hall, April 2012
- Interface Roundtable, February 2012 at Belfast Castle

Practitioner Work & Initiatives

A large part of BCRC's most important work takes place at a local level by assisting and supporting local organisations, groups and networks through a variety of methods that range from advice, facilitation, assisting low capacity group, helping to organise democratic processes and informal training. Another key aspect of this work is the BCRC Local/Key Area Contact network which has been reviewed during this funding period to better reflect realities on the ground and to increase collaborative working and enhance synergy. The project's activities under this theme include:

- In excess of 70 Local/Key Area Contact meetings
- 7 Citywide Local/Key Area Contact meetings
- LAC/KAC Residential, January 2014 at Hilton Templepatrick
- BCRC representation on 34 community and intercommunity structures across Belfast
- Practical support and assistance provided to 53 local groups

Shared History & Dealing with the Past

During the month of June 2014, BCRC organised two events with relevance to this theme. The first took place on 10th June and involved the screening of *We Were There*, a documentary on women's experience related to the Maze Long Kesh, as well as a panel discussion with film makers, film participants and those with relevant experience and knowledge. The second event was scheduled for 25th June and took the form of a seminar on *Gender and Dealing with the Past: UN Resolution 1325*, including presentations related to UN Resolution 1325, a brief overview of BCRC's research *Gender at the Interface* and a panel discussion with representatives of a range of backgrounds and viewpoints.

Some examples of other activities organised under this theme are:

- 'The Hungry Thirties': Shared History Youth Event, Clifton House September 2013
- The Legacy of the Home Rule Bills: 1886-1912, Clifton House November 2012
- Nationalism and the Ulster Covenant, Linen Hall Library November 2012

Research Projects & Policy

During the most recent Peace III funding period a number of research and policy publications have been commissioned and produced by the project that cover a range of relevant topics:

Young People and Sectarianism Interface Survey

Copius Consulting has recently completed a survey investigating the theme of young people and sectarianism on behalf of BCRC. In particular, the survey focused on young people's attitudes regarding sectarianism, what it means to them and how it impacts on their lives. It is anticipated that the findings of the survey on Young People & Sectarianism will be incorporated into the BCRC Anti-Sectarianism Toolkit. Overall aim of the survey:

- To capture a youth-perspective on sectarianism through a survey of selected young people in interface areas.
- To provide an overview of relevant recent research and reports dealing with the issue of young people and sectarianism

Anti-Sectarianism Model/Toolkit

BCRC appointed ICR (Institute for Conflict Research) to produce an Anti-Sectarianism Toolkit and Training Model on behalf of the project. As acknowledged in the 'Together: Building a United Community Strategy' issued by OFMDFM in May 2013, sectarianism continues to form one of the main divides within society and we also recognise, as outlined in the ministerial document, that everyone has a role to play in tackling this issue. For our part we believe that the development of a pilot toolkit and training programme with a focus on sectarianism will help make a positive contribution towards the implementation of the strategy.

The aims of the toolkit include defining sectarianism within local/national/international contexts as well as distinguishing between local and urban settings, outlining the history of sectarianism and the different forms that the phenomenon takes and also providing a summary and analysis of what models exist to tackle it locally and worldwide. In addition, the contractor will provide an outline of a pilot training programme that can be rolled out by BCRC within the local context of Belfast as well as beyond. The Toolkit will further include a draft anti-sectarianism charter for use by BCRC during the delivery phase of the training.

Building Peace at Belfast's Interfaces: A Gendered Perspective

As part of organising its 25th June 2014 conference on 'Gender & Dealing with the Past: UN Resolution 1325', BCRC staff produced a report which aimed to discuss and summarise implications of the *Gender at the Interface* research, BCRC's March 2012 response and a note from a workshop facilitated with research participants. More specifically, the report applies key aspects of UN Resolution 1325 to conflict resolution and interface work in the context of Belfast.

Building Sustainable Communities: Challenges & Opportunities

During workshops held by BCRC across Belfast in early 2008, it was made clear that the key issues of concern for interface communities fall into six overall categories: community safety and policing, youth, education, employment, health and, not least, housing and development. On the back of these workshops and BCRC's ongoing work in interface communities across the city, a position paper on interfaces was produced in 2010 which outlined a response to the ongoing discussion on peace walls and barriers, stressing the importance of addressing the underlying issues in interface areas, i.e. the causes and not just the symptoms. BCRC concludes that "the issue of interface walls and barriers needs to be seen in the context of local regeneration of interface areas in which residents and local communities decide their priorities and give direction for strategies to improve the living conditions of residents." On this basis, BCRC believes that the issue of regeneration and development in interface areas has received insufficient attention and that the barriers to building sustainable communities therefore need to be further investigated.

In November 2012, BCRC therefore commissioned CMWorks to carry out a survey on the theme of *Building Sustainable Communities: the Regeneration and Development of Interface Communities*. The survey focused on an examination of potential barriers that persist regarding the regeneration and development of interface communities and recommendations for overcoming these.

Training & Capacity Building

As part of the aim to lend support and assistance to local communities, groups and networks, BCRC for instance organised the following capacity building opportunities during the period February 2012-September 2014.

- Identity: Flags & Emblems, September 2014 at Intercomm
- Prejudice Awareness, September 2014 at Intercomm
- Engagement & Facilitation of Discussions on Contentious Issues, September 2014 at Intercomm
- Effective Lobbying, September 2014 at Intercomm
- Tendering & Procurement of Services, June 2014 at NICVA
- Accreditation for Prior Learning (APEL), July-August 2013 at University of Ulster
- Emerging Leaders Youth Mentoring Programme
(24 young people completed the training programme during 2012-2013)
- Flags & Emblems training focussed on young people, February-March 2013
- A Study of Racism in a Global Context, November 2012 Wellington Park Hotel

International Activities

To further promote project activities and achievements as well as encourage reciprocal learning, the project has completed a number of activities with an international focus, including:

- Study visit to Brussels, September 2014
- International seminar on *Police Accountability – Failure Has Consequences: A Case Study of the Marikana Commission, South Africa*, September 2014
- *International Perspectives on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation*, December 2013
- Attendance at International conference regarding “From Peacemaking to Peacebuilding – Journeys towards Reconciliation” organised jointly by Rotary and INCORE

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BCRC is supported by four partner organisations: **Falls Community Council** (lead agency) | **Charter NI** | **EPIC** | **Intercomm**