

SSGT Supporting Inter-Community Practice and Activism Pilot Grant Programme - Year 1 Interim Report

Introduction

SSGT received funding from Porticus UK to support the development of a 2-year pilot grassroots community engagement programme to support its two long term goals:

- *The establishment of collaborative and supportive relationships within and between communities is seen as a primary issue in peacebuilding;*
- *To support the Northern Irish post peace agreement environment to evolve from a 'negative peace' defined as an absence of violence and war to a 'positive peace' defined by the integration of society through collaborative and supportive relationships.*

This is one of three strands of support from Porticus, the other two being the Northern Ireland Human Rights Fund¹ and the Social Change Initiative's (SCI) Fellowship Programme².

SSGT, assisted by an Advisory Group³, developed a two-year pilot small grants programme. The Supporting Inter-Community Practice and Activism Programme (SIPA) was launched in May 2017 and all awards made by September 2017 (See Appendix 1). A formative evaluation was commissioned in September 2017 to capture learning over the life of the programme together with the outcomes achieved.

Grant programme

An open call for applications was made in Spring 2017. The SIPA programme aimed to develop or strengthen collaborative and supportive relationships within and between communities. Specifically it was intended that SIPA would result in:

- Increased confidence, participation, leadership and effective activism within and between communities;
- New inter-community relationships built and/or existing relationships strengthened;
- Learning on barriers to inclusive working within and between communities and how these can be overcome; and, over a longer term,
- New or strengthened informal structures across communities.

Applications were assessed against the following criteria:

- Evidence of collective activism;
- Evidence that the proposed work would offer the potential to provide a step change in on-going work or work already undertaken;
- the ability of proposed work to strengthen local confidence, leadership and participation on an inclusive basis;
- willingness to engage in sharing and critical reflection;
- evidence of the need for funding for the project;
- potential for sustainability.

¹ See <https://www.nihumanrightsfund.org/about>

² See <https://www.thesocialchangeinitiative.org/>

³ Members include: Lyn Carvill (Womenstec), Michael Hughes (Space and Place), June Trimble (Youth Action), Paddy Sloan (BBC Children in Need), Conal McFeely (Creggan Enterprises), Lesley Carroll (Deputy Chief Commissioner at ECNI and Voice of the Victim Manager at Victim Support NI), Avila Kilmurray and Orla O'Neill (SSGT), Adam Berry (Porticus)

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SSGT trustees agreed grants of £230,000 for 10 projects over the two years. Three focused on women, five on young people and two were place-based. In addition to grants, the programme was designed to provide grantees with the opportunity to participate in three Learning Network Meetings to reflect on their projects and to share experience and learning with each other and with SSGT.

Interim evaluation summary

What has been learned from the work of the projects

Although the approach and methodology of the work was diverse, factors contributing to the success of individual projects include:

- Building in time in programming for informal engagement through social activities to build trust;
- Taking a flexible approach to programme delivery including moving at the participant's pace, understanding that the level of engagement and time participants can commit will vary at times, responding to needs as they arise and changing approaches in light of emerging challenges;
- The importance of careful pre-project engagement planning and relationship building to build trust both between project providers and participants and individual participants;
- Building in an element of co-design in what is delivered can be a powerful tool in empowering participants and fostering higher levels of engagement.

Impact of contextual challenges

While factors to do with the political environment were discussed by projects as a backdrop to their work, for most these issues have had no direct impact on the delivery of projects with planned work unaffected. What did emerge from a number of projects is that the current political instability and the outworking of the Brexit negotiations is squeezing the middle ground and leading to a 'hardening of positions'.

The growing diversity of the population in Northern Ireland and in the local communities in which the projects are operating was a theme across more than half of the projects.

The inter-generational impact of the conflict as evidenced in high rates of suicide, drug misuse and mental ill health emerged as a common feature in most of the youth projects.

Gatekeeping, the process where those with influence work to exert control over what happens in their communities, emerged as a key challenge for one project. Navigating gatekeeping took time and careful engagement.

Another project found it difficult to recruit women to its planned programme which it attributes to the lack of a funding stream to support women in rural communities in general in Northern Ireland and which has led to a falling away of women's groups in many rural areas.

Learning from the clusters

What has been a striking feature of the discussions had at Learning Network Meetings noted by grantees has been the extent to which groups across clusters are dealing with the same issues whether as a youth project, women's group or place-based project. Issues around: poverty; the inter-generational legacy of the conflict in terms of high rates of suicide, drug misuse, poor mental health; inequality; racism; segregation and interfaces; and the negative influence of paramilitary control. The importance of language as a source of division emerged as a strong theme in

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discussions including the need to reframe/reclaim the politicisation or 'greening' of issues and concepts such as human rights and social justice.

Across clusters there is good evidence of the building of trust between individual participants from different communities what social capital theory refers to as bridging.

What has been learned from the SIPA process

The Advisory Group played a key role in the design of SIPA and its experience and expertise was invaluable. The decision to appoint a local assessor with significant and current experience in community based activism and peacebuilding and a good awareness of issues at a local level was also helpful. During the roll out of the process, it was clear that some applicants did struggle with the concept of peacebuilding and would have benefited from clearer direction on precisely what this term encompasses.

SSGT's approach to the SIPA grants process and reporting is perceived to have been proportionate and flexible. A view was expressed that there is a real need for such smaller scale funding opportunities which can be more flexible and which allow organisation the time and space to respond to issues in the most appropriate manner.

Learning Network Meetings provided an opportunity for groups, which in broad terms share similar values and aims, to network and engage with others they would not normally meet to share learning and experiences. They gave an opportunity to take time out and reflect on their work with their peers and the discussions were useful in comparing experiences and practice, sign-posting to sources of advice and practical support and learning about the tools and approaches being used by others which could inform their own work.

Developing an evaluation approach applicable to such a diverse range of projects was challenging. However working jointly with grantees to develop tools enabled the development of an approach which worked well for most projects.

Conclusion summary

Community divisions are not solely around traditional fault lines and that approaches to peacebuilding need to take account of the outworking of the growing diversity of the Northern Ireland population particularly at a time of heightened tensions around community identity.

Factors contributing to the success of the pilot programme to date include the support of local expertise through the Advisory Group and local assessor and the Learning Network Meetings of grantees.

Learning points include the need to build in sufficient time for both programme design and implementation; the need for clarity around key concepts such as peacebuilding; and the value of using a range of tools to capture and assess both quantitative and qualitative impact.

Appendix 2: Project summaries

Organisation	What will be delivered	Primary beneficiaries	Total grant
Youth Cluster			
1 Youth Initiatives	A youth leader programme in each year of SIPA for school aged young people aged 15+ from 2 areas of Belfast (1 PUL, 1 CNR). The programme involves leadership and good relations training, residentials and meetings held on an inter-community basis together with the young people applying their skills in their own communities through 3 hours volunteering in other Youth Initiative projects and through summer schemes for 11-14 year olds. There is also an annual Leadership Awards dinner.	40 participants who are trained as youth leaders/volunteers each year. Other young people benefitting from engagement with the young leaders in summer schemes	£25,000
2 Artillery Youth Services	A youth leadership and community action programme delivered on an inter-community basis for young people (4 PUL, 8 CNR) aged 18+ from disadvantaged interface communities in North Belfast impacted by the conflict. All were at risk of involvement with or had been involved with the youth justice system and were assessed as having influence with their peers. The programme involves residentials, team building social activities, leadership training and mentoring with participants supported to complete OCN accredited youth work level 2 training. As part of this they completed training in first aid, child protection together with workshops on community leadership, social history, politics and governance. Volunteering is an integral part of the programme with young people undertaking a placement with a community based organisation and working together to design and deliver four community projects.	10 participants each year Communities benefitting from community projects developed by the participants	£12,000
3 Oasis Youth	A youth leadership and development programme delivered on an inter-community basis for young PUL, CNR, EM people aged 11-14 from Portadown's interface communities. The programme held in Oasis Youth premises in the evenings involves residentials, team building activities and OCN accredited good relations, equality and diversity training. As part of the project young people volunteer in the Oasis Youth inter-community summer scheme and design and deliver a social action project in interface areas.	20 participants each year Other young people benefitting from a social action project	£18,450
4 Reach Across	Programmes for 240 young people aged 14-17 provided by facilitators in and after school. SSGT funding is supporting short accredited courses in good relations and citizenship which contain an inter-community element, a after school course for participants from 7 schools and short residentials targeted in the main at young people who have taken part in Reach Across courses.	240 participants	£20,000

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5 Quaker Service	A story-telling project of the lives of young people - aged 18+ and living in West Belfast - post the Good Friday Agreement using film, photography, storytelling, poetry and art. The programme also aimed to include the experience of a group of EM young people being supported by Homeplus NI a homeless charity that runs a drop in centre for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Year 1 of the project focussed on the development of a report and video of the young people's stories which has now been published and launched at Stormont. Year 2 of the project will involve creating a lobby for change around some of the issues highlighted in the report.	10 participants from West Belfast and their families, EM participants engaged by Homeplus NI Communities	£26,000
Place based cluster			
6 Carson Project	Facilitated parallel and joint workshop discussions with a broad range of constituency and other groups in greater Ballymena (PUL) through the Carson Project and in Derry/Londonderry through Leafair Community Association based in the Shantallow area (CNR). The project has involved work on a single identity basis in each area followed by a series of joint events involving participants from both areas to explore a range of politically contentious, social, community and cultural issues. The aim is to enable participants to hear differing perspectives including those of people who have never had the opportunity to hear from people with a different community background or perspective. It is planned to produce a series of short booklets arising from discussions.	Participants Local communities through intra and inter- community relationship building and dialogue	£26,000
7 Éalú	A capacity building and outreach programme aimed at fostering engagement within and between communities in the East Tyrone area which has been significantly impacted by the conflict and had relatively little by way of support to enable it to come to terms with this. This has involved relationship building within the local CNR community and constituency groups marginalised from peacebuilding and with the PUL community through workshops, events and dialogue. These have focussed on mediating and fostering dialogue around issues creating community tensions such as Brexit, bonfires, flags and emblems and those arising from the annual marching season.	Participants Local communities through intra and inter-community relationship building and dialogue	£26,000

Women's Cluster			
8 Ballybeen Women's Centre	A joint learning programme in each year of SIPA delivered by two Women's Centres in two disadvantaged areas impacted by conflict (1 PUL, 1 CNR). The programme involves training, study visits, events and residentials to foster learning about the 'other community', tackle issues of identity and cultural awareness, explore experiences of the conflict and 'others' perceptions and supports women into personal development paths that it is hoped will lead to enhanced intra and inter-community engagement. It was intended to carry out some engagement on a single identity basis initially to build confidence and then move to inter-community engagement. Pre-planning and relationship building enabled engagement at an inter-community level more quickly than expected negating the need for single identity work.	Planned to work with 20-30 participants each year. In year one 75 women took part to some extent with a core group of around 20 taking part on a regular basis.	£26,000
9 Rural Community Network (RCN)	A capacity development and peacebuilding training programme delivered in conjunction with NIRWN, REACT and BCRC for women in four geographical areas facing challenges in peacebuilding and community development issues. The programme involves confidence building and training to foster confidence and learning about relationship building, community development practice, social justice issues and leadership. A final residential will bring all of the participants together to build an informal support network.	40 participants Potential for the development of a network of women activists	£24,240
10 Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)	Through a process of training, awareness raising, events, residentials and community activism, this project aims to realise the 5 key recommendations of research carried out by 5 women's groups in North Belfast which focus on what is required to move communities forward in terms of dealing with paramilitaries, funding work with women, flag disputes, political leadership and housing. WRDA is supporting local women's groups to be active agents of change and develop a Charter for Action as a lobbying tool to share with the women's sector, policy makers and politicians. The Charter will set out key principles for dealing with difficult and contentious issues. A total of four groups are now taking part in the project including two which took part in the research (three PUL, one CRN). As the project rolled out some changes to the original training planned needed to be made in light of emerging issues.	Is working with 20 participants. Communities – through the Charter which will include a list of demands and principles that participants can take to their communities to educate and create inter-community engagement and support for a vision for positive change Charter has potential as a lobbying tool and model of good practice which could be replicated across communities.	£26,000