

# Building Supportive Relationships and Activism at Community Level in Northern Ireland

Learning report on  
St Stephen's Green Trust's  
Pilot Grant Programme

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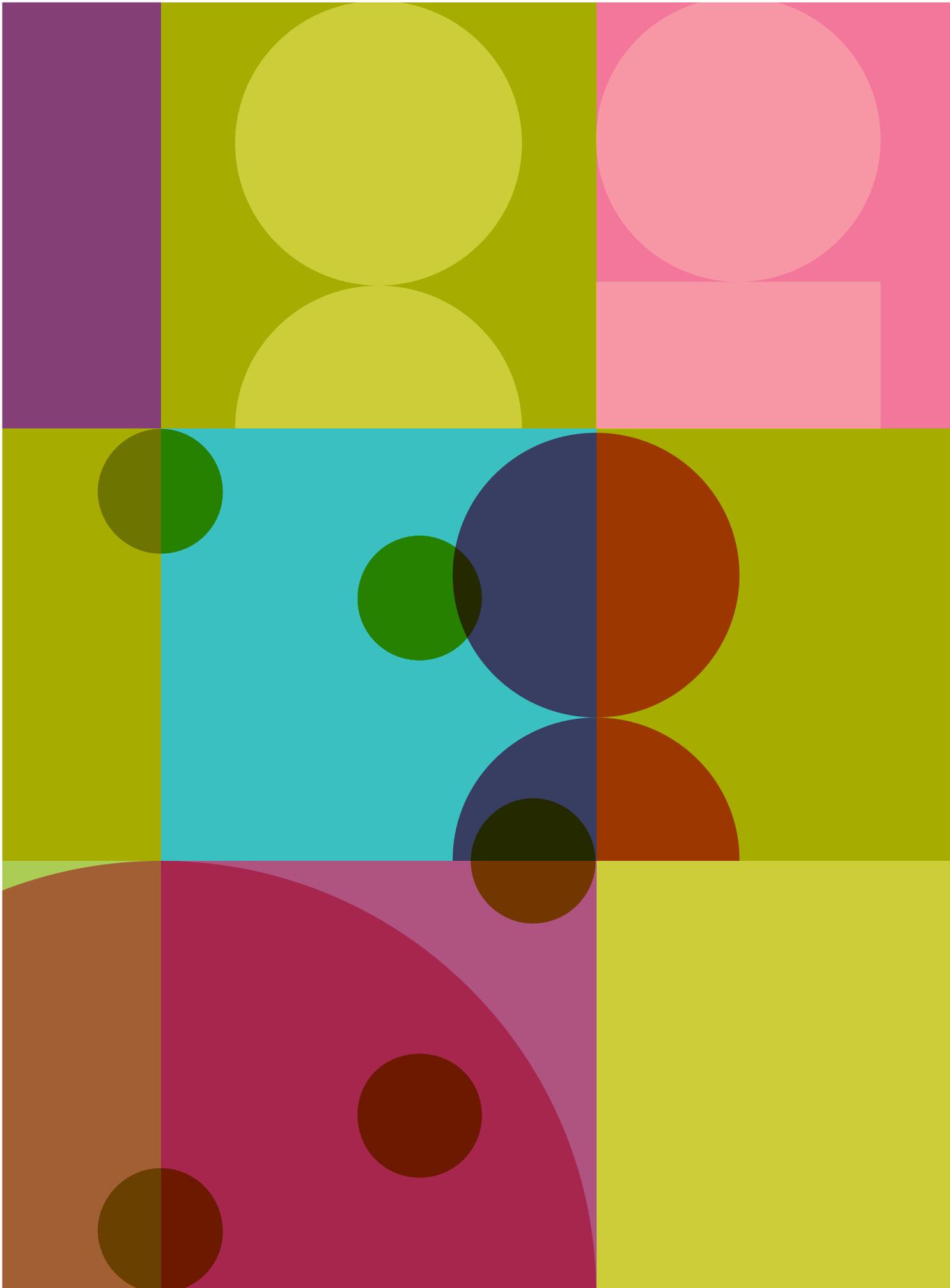
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# foreword

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## Strengthening Inter-Community Practice and Activism (SIPA)

The Irish have a saying about the weather: if you don't like it wait ten minutes and it will change. Arguably the same may be said about the circumstances of working in Northern Ireland, the North of Ireland, or whatever is your preference in terms of naming. The failure to agree on terminology reflects the very different narratives of rapidly changing circumstances. It is within this context that the Strengthening Inter-Community Practice & Activism Programme (SIPA) set itself the task of working with three clusters of local groups across Northern Ireland – drawn from the Women's Sector, the Youth Sector and geographically-based activists who were engaging in tentative dialogue. Spanning the period 2017–2019, the macro-context of political acrimony and uncertainty was not ideal, but the St. Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) was acutely aware that local community activists often had long experience of working within, and through, such conditions. Yet they still had the motivation and commitment of continuing to find opportunities to engage in peacebuilding in its broadest sense.

There are those who may well raise a questioning eyebrow at the need for peacebuilding some twenty years after the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998). The reality is that not only do local communities in Northern Ireland have to live with the unresolved trauma resulting from over thirty years of violence, but they also have to face the prospect of major long-term constitutional change in terms of Brexit and beyond, as well as forging a politics and society that can cope with such change. These challenges do not only speak to economic and social prospects, but they also tug at emotions and sense of identity. That is what makes local activism in Northern Ireland so complex, yet so important and rewarding.

The ten projects that were supported with funding under SIPA were very different in composition, but they shared the realisation that activism needs to be complemented by space for reflection if it is to be effective over time. There was a need for this reflection to take place on an inter-community basis (inclusive of largely 'single identity' Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist areas, but also taking cognisance of the BME community) in order to identify shared concerns, fears and aspirations, but it was equally essential to allow space for intra-community reflection given increasing tension within communities. The fact that SIPA benefitted from both the advice of members of the Advisory Group, drawn together for this programme, and was in dialogue with the activists themselves, offered an important added value dimension to the funding allocated. The Learning Network meetings that brought together representatives of the projects enabled the SSGT to be responsive to ongoing developments and to respond in a flexible manner. This goes to the core of an effective peacebuilding approach.

With media headlines fixated on the latest positioning within the macro politics of elected representatives, it is sometimes easy to overlook the work that is carried out at local level – the political with a small ‘p’ work as compared to the capital ‘P’ of representative democracy. Activities, dialogue and outreach by the activists funded remind us of the day-to-day care and courage that is shown when people from very different backgrounds meet together for the first time or engage in discussion as to how to manage contentious symbols, demonstrations and political differences. This is the stuff of peacebuilding.

As is noted in this report, SIPA was a pilot programme. SSGT intends to build on the learning in developing its work over the next three years, and hopefully, beyond. It would not have been able to do this without continued partnership with its main donor, working through Porticus; the support of the members of the Northern Ireland Advisory Group; its External Evaluator, Pamela Montgomery; the programme Assessor, Monina O’Prey and SSGT Executive Director, Orla O’Neill. But most importantly it was able to draw on the enthusiasm of activists and participants in the various funded projects. To all of them, our thanks.

W.B. Yeats wrote of ‘peace comes dropping slow’ – whether in Dungannon or Ballybeen or New Lodge that slow dropping of peace must be welcomed and supported. It is what gives us hope.

Avila Kilmurray,  
Trustee, St Stephen’s Green Trust  
November 2019



# executive summary

## Background

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In 2017, St Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) launched a new two year pilot grants programme – Strengthening Inter-Community Practice and Activism (SIPA). The aim of the programme was to contribute to grass-roots based peacebuilding in Northern Ireland through the support of projects focused on developing collaborative relationships within communities or between communities of different religious or cultural backgrounds. 10 grants of between £12,000 and £26,000 over a two year period (a total of almost £230,000), were made to support clusters of projects working primarily with young people or women and projects focused on working with a range of groups in a geographical location.

This report sets out the findings of an external evaluation carried out over the life of SIPA. It sets out the context in which SIPA and the projects operated, what was achieved and outlines learning from the work of the projects and the operation of the programme.

## Findings

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The report highlights the challenges for grass roots peacebuilding at this time of great uncertainty about the future. Existing tensions and divisions have been heightened or reignited by Brexit and the collapse of the local administration has resulted in political and legislative paralysis. The impact of this broader context at community level emerged as an increasing theme over the life of SIPA manifested in reports of a sense of pessimism that change is possible, disillusionment with politics and political representatives and a hardening of positions and reluctance of people to engage in peacebuilding work in some communities.

In this difficult context, the funded projects have worked effectively and created space for people, often for the first time, to work collaboratively alongside those from different religious or cultural backgrounds and to work together on shared interests and issues. The evaluation found evidence of change among those who took part in the funded projects in terms of increased confidence and participation, leadership and activism at community level. Positive relationships were built between people from different backgrounds which seem to have been maintained. SIPA has also contributed to strengthened relationships between organisations within and across communities.

The report identifies learning from the projects and the elements of peacebuilding practice that have worked well and have helped to overcome the challenges to peacebuilding at this time. This included: providing space for people to bond and identify things they shared; taking time for planning and relationship building before the work got underway; taking a flexible approach to delivery; co-designing the work with participants; using storytelling as a mechanism to engage young people; and working in an inclusive way. The report also outlines learning from how SIPA was designed and operated by SSGT which could usefully inform SSGT's future work. This included: making use of local knowledge and experience; building in time for the funded projects to come together and reflect on their work; keeping reporting proportionate; and showing flexibility to projects when plans need to change. The report also highlights the value of small grants in supporting peacebuilding at a local level.

## SECTION 1

# introduction

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## 1.1 St. Stephen's Green Trust

St Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT) is a charitable foundation which respects human dignity and is committed to helping create a society where the dignity of all can be realised through social justice and inclusive, nurturing communities.

It has a long history of grantmaking focused on supporting community based activism and work to address inequalities and injustice. While it has supported work in Northern Ireland, historically the bulk of its grantmaking has been to community groups in Ireland.

Beginning in late 2015, the Trust began to explore whether and how it might make a contribution to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. This was in the context of an understanding that while Northern Ireland has made significant progress since the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), difficult challenges remain around the development of trust within and between communities and around the creation of an agreed vision for society.

In late 2016 SSGT was successful in securing the support of one of its donors to enable the development of a two year pilot grants programme – Supporting Inter-Community Practice and Activism (SIPA) – focussed on supporting grass roots community level projects.

## 1.2 The SIPA programme

In early 2017 SSGT established an Advisory Group of individuals based in Northern Ireland with extensive experience of peacebuilding at community level across a range of sectors. The Advisory Group, which was chaired by one of SSGT's trustees, took part in a facilitated process to design a pilot peacebuilding programme designed to develop or strengthen relationships within and between communities.

The SIPA programme was launched in May 2017 through an open application process and awards were made by September of that year. Grants were awarded to 10 community based organisations to take forward a range of projects focused on working with young people, women or with a range of groups in a geographical location. As part of the process a formative evaluation was commissioned in autumn 2017 to capture learning over the life of the programme and to document the outcomes achieved. The evaluation process was designed to add value to the work of the projects by providing project workers with opportunities for reflection and to share learning with each other. In addition, it was intended that the evaluation would assist SSGT to become better positioned to consider how best to contribute to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. An interim report was made available to SSGT in 2018.

This report sets out the findings of the evaluation over the life of the programme from its early design stage to its conclusion in September 2019. It was written at a time of great uncertainty about the future one month before the United Kingdom was due to leave the EU on 31 October 2019. It provides further information about the rationale for the programme, the context in which it was launched and operated and how it was developed. It outlines the difference made to those who took part in the funded projects, to the organisations which ran them and identifies some impacts at a broader community level. The report also documents the types of challenges community based peacebuilding projects have to address and how these were mitigated. It concludes with a high level overview of what the programme has achieved.

## SECTION 2

# why and how SIPA was developed

## 2.1 The rationale for SIPA

### 2.1.1. Peacebuilding

Since the early 1990s there has been a growing appreciation of the importance of longer term perspectives on what is needed for societies to transition from violent conflict to peace.

In this regard the United Nations review of international approaches to conflict which led to its *An Agenda for Peace* report is significant. This introduced the term 'post conflict peacebuilding' defined as '*sustained, co-operative work to deal with underlying social, cultural and humanitarian problems*' seen as critical to providing a foundation for the prevention of the reoccurrence of violence.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective more wide ranging transformation which addresses the structural inequalities which gave rise to conflict in the first place together with measures which address the societal impacts of violent conflict – such as fear, mistrust and the segregation and polarisation of communities – is required if formal peace agreements are to be sustained. In the absence of this it has been argued that a 'negative' peace has been created, one in which there is an absence of violence but at the risk of a recurrence of conflict. In contrast, 'positive peace' is created where the structural inequalities that underpinned violence have been addressed making peace more sustainable.<sup>2</sup> Peacebuilding efforts need to address the root causes of violence but also to transform the dynamics between individuals and groups.

Peacebuilding theorist and practitioner John Paul Lederach has argued that building sustainable peace calls for an inclusive process which involves the development of relationships between and leadership from the political elite, middle level leaders and grassroots organisations and activists.<sup>3</sup> His highly influential model outlines the importance of the inclusion of all levels of society in peacebuilding and of the linkages and relationships across these levels. Sustainable peace needs to be built from the bottom up as much as from the top down with those at the grass roots having an important role to play in the process.

1 Jarman, N (2016) The Challenge of Peace Building and Conflict Transformation: A Case Study of Northern Ireland. *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal*, 117-128.

2 Galtung, J (1967) *Theories of Peace: A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking*. Oslo, International Peace Research Institute.

3 Lederach, J (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, United States Institute of Peace.

## 2.1.2. Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland 'peace process' culminated in the endorsement of the GFA Agreement in 1998 in referenda on both parts of the island of Ireland. This landmark agreement committed the political parties to democratic and peaceful methods to resolve political issues, to using their influence to bring about the decommissioning of armed groups and the normalisation of security arrangements. It proved to be a turning point in countering a period of violent conflict in and about Northern Ireland spanning 30 years and which had claimed the lives of over 3,600 people with thousands more injured or displaced.

The final agreement brought new constitutional and citizenship arrangements, provisions for measures intended to resolve critical issues including the decommissioning of weapons, the early release of prisoners convicted of conflict-related offences and for safeguarding equality and human rights.

The peace process, which was drawn out over many years, was a multi-level process which involved: political parties; the British and Irish governments; external support from key international figures, the American government and international donors; and civil society groups and organisations. Work by civil society organisations and grass roots leadership played a vital role complementing the high level negotiations by building peace on the ground. In the period following on from the Agreement, this continued and expanded in part due to the external funding from the European Union's Peace Programme and philanthropic sources. Much of this work was focussed on the societal challenges of peace and the legacy of the conflict. In particular working to establish trust and rebuilding damaged relationships between the two main communities - Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic, Nationalist, Republican (CNR) - as well as between members of former armed groups and between communities and government agencies.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, however, international donors have reduced their investment in Northern Ireland peacebuilding programmes from the significant levels available in the early 2000s. It has been argued that this reduction has not been accompanied by an increase in domestic support with community based initiatives and groups reporting a reduction in funding.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jarman

<sup>5</sup> Morrow, D Faulkner-Byrne, L and Pettis, S (2018) *Funding Peace*. Belfast, Corrymeela Press.

### 2.1.3. The current context for peacebuilding

Much has changed in Northern Ireland since the signing of the GFA. The scale of politically motivated violence and paramilitary activity has altered significantly with the number of shootings, bombings and assaults greatly reduced.<sup>6</sup> However, society as a whole continues to face broad challenges in building and sustaining a 'positive' peace. These include a lack of trust in a society fractured by sustained conflict, building an agreed vision for the future and dealing with the consequences or legacies of the conflict.

In the interim decades, these issues have continued to frustrate the post-agreement landscape reflected in for example continued segregation of communities on religious and political grounds<sup>7</sup> and higher rates of suicide and mental ill-health than in Ireland or Great Britain<sup>8</sup> with evidence of inter-generational impacts of the legacy of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Even though systemic violence has radically reduced since the GFA, with no evidence of significant support for a return to the violence of the past, paramilitary groups continue to exert control and influence in local communities through violence or the threat of violence<sup>10</sup> with young people particularly vulnerable.<sup>11</sup> The post GFA dispensation has singularly failed to tackle either the legacy of the conflict – including a range of issues around victims and survivors, acknowledgement and truth and justice – or to prioritise peacebuilding.<sup>12</sup> It has been argued that frequent disputes between the two communities around public space, flags and emblems, bonfires, language and equality issues, are manifestations of the continuation of conflict by other means<sup>13</sup>, which shift and change and are exploited for political purposes.<sup>14</sup> A strong direction for peacebuilding policy has been inhibited by a lack of consensus among the political parties.

These factors have presented challenges to the stability of the post GFA institutions and in the decades since the GFA the power sharing Executive has been highly vulnerable to these unresolved issues. Tensions remain and distrust persists between the PUL and CNR communities and the main parties that represent them, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin (SF).

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- 6 *The Fresh Start Panel Report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland* available at [https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/stormont-agreement/2016-06-07\\_Fresh-Start-Panel\\_paramilitary-groups.pdf](https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/stormont-agreement/2016-06-07_Fresh-Start-Panel_paramilitary-groups.pdf)
- 7 Wilson, R (2016) *The Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number Three*. Belfast, Community Relations Council.
- 8 O'Neill, S. et al. (2014). Patterns of Suicidal Ideation and Behavior in Northern Ireland and Associations with Conflict Related Trauma available at <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0091532>
- 9 O'Neill, S Armour, C Bolton, D Bunting, B Corry, C Devine, B Ennis, E Ferry, F McKenna, A McLafferty, M and Murphy, G (2015). *Towards A Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*. Belfast: Commission for Victims and Survivors.
- 10 The Fresh Start Panel Report.
- 11 Morrow, D Byrne, J and Hamber, B (2016). *Political violence and young people: Exploring levels of risk, motivations and targeted preventative work* available at <https://www.community-relations.org.uk/publications/political-violence-and-young-people-exploring-levels-risk-motivations-and-targeted>
- 12 Hamber, B and Kelly, G (2018) *Response on Reconciliation to the Consultation Paper: Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past*. INCORE, University of Ulster. Submitted online 5 October 2018.
- 13 Gray, A Hamilton, J Kelly, G Lynn, B Melaugh, M & Robinson, G (2018) *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number Five*. Belfast: Community Relations Council.
- 14 Coyles, D Hamber, B & Grant, A (2018). *Hidden Barriers and Divisive Architecture: The Case of Belfast* available from [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/series7/coyles200618.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series7/coyles200618.pdf)

Currently, the political context is uncertain and unstable. The local administration collapsed in January 2017, an outworking of the poor state of relations between the DUP and SF and amid a significant financial scandal that has raised issues around governance and accountability and which is the subject of a judicial inquiry that is expected to report shortly. In the interim negotiations have proceeded but appear to be in stalemate. It has been argued that the loss of the Conservative Party majority in the 2017 general election and the formation of a minority government which relied on the support of the DUP has made reaching an agreement on a devolved government more difficult.<sup>15</sup>

The most recent Community Relations Peace Monitoring Report<sup>16</sup> highlights how the absence of a functioning devolved government in Northern Ireland has resulted in legislative and political paralysis. It concludes that a lack of progress on everyday social policy issues is permeating every aspect of life and disproportionately affecting the most disadvantaged. The UK's decision to leave the EU has placed additional strains on the relationship between the DUP and SF and relations between the Irish and British governments making the restoration of government more difficult.

While many issues remain unresolved, it is clear that Brexit will have significant and far-reaching implications for Ireland North and South. Uncertainties around Brexit has created considerable unease particularly in border areas and pushed the issue of a border poll up the political agenda. There is evidence of a positive shift among the CNR community for a united Ireland<sup>17</sup> and a fall in PUL support for the backstop – the proposal in the agreement between the UK and the EU which aims to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland after the UK leaves the EU.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Archick, K (2017) *Northern Ireland: Current Issues and Ongoing Challenges in the Peace Process*. Congressional research service.

16 Gray, A Hamilton, J Kelly, G Lynn, B Melaugh, M and Robinson, G (2018) *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number 5*. Belfast, Community Relations Council.

17 The Journal.ie, "51% of people in Northern Ireland support Irish unification, new poll finds," 22 September 2019.

18 Katy Hayward "She holds the key to the Brexit deadlock. But will Arlene Foster dare to use it?" The Guardian, 22 September 2019.

## 2.2 How SIPA was developed

### 2.2.1. Programme design

Over 2015 and 2016, SSGT worked closely with Porticus, representing one of its main funders, in a process of information gathering and research around how it might bring its experience of community grantmaking to support peacebuilding work in Northern Ireland. This involved meetings with organisations and individuals in Northern Ireland to discuss key issues and commissioning a scoping study on emerging social need.

As a result of this and other engagements, Porticus initiated a two year learning programme focussed on supporting peacebuilding in Northern Ireland including provision for a grass roots community grant programme to be led by SSGT. Other elements of this Porticus programme were support to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Fund<sup>19</sup> and the Social Change Initiative's (SCI) Fellowship Programme.<sup>20</sup> The latter provides short fellowships to support activists to enhance their leadership and the impact of their work for social change. It also operates a mentoring programme to support activists to develop their full potential as leaders.

Following on from securing funding, SSGT trustees established an Advisory Group to assist in the design of a community based peacebuilding programme (see Appendix 1 for membership). Members of the Advisory Group were selected by SSGT based on their significant experience of community development and peacebuilding and awareness of the funding environment in Northern Ireland for work in this area.

The Advisory Group attended two planning workshops in March and April 2017 to design the programme and a theory of change through a facilitated process. Some high level research on the current funding environment for community organisations, which funders are active and what work is being supported was also carried out to inform discussions.

The subsequent SIPA programme aimed to develop or strengthen collaborative and supportive relationships within communities (intra-community) and between PUL and CNR communities (inter-community). Specifically it was intended that SIPA would result in:

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

<sup>19</sup> See <https://www.nihumanrightsfund.org/about>

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.thesocialchangeinitiative.org/>

The Advisory Group decided to structure SIPA to provide 10 small grants of up to £26,000 over two years to support projects which would provide opportunities for people to work collaboratively on an inclusive basis within their community and/or between communities. One of the core assumptions underpinning the programme was that supporting projects focused on collaborative work on social or economic issues would help communities find common cause.

As this was a pilot programme, a decision was taken to target SIPA at three different interest groups: groups working with women or young people and groups working in a geographical area. It was intended that this cluster approach to funding would offer the potential to identify learning from different issues and contexts.

In addition to grants, SIPA was designed to provide grantees with the opportunity to come together as a group over the course of the programme to reflect on their projects and to share experience and learning with each other and with SSGT. A small amount of funding was also available to meet any technical support needs if these emerged. It was also expected that there would be scope for exploiting potential synergies between the SIPA and the SCI Fellowship and Mentoring Programme, also being funded through Porticus.

### 2.2.2. Selection of projects

SIPA was launched in May 2017 using a two stage application process: an open call for expressions of interest followed by an invitation for full applications after an initial sift. 44 expressions of interest were received and following shortlisting full applications were sought from 16 organisations in June 2018. An assessor based in Northern Ireland and with significant experience in community based activism and peacebuilding was appointed to carry out an assessment of each of the applications received which included a site visit to discuss proposals.

The Advisory Group met to consider applications in July 2018 and recommended eight applications for funding to the SSGT Board; three focused on women and five on young people with organisations receiving a letter of offer by August 2018. As not all the funds were committed a decision was taken to proactively seek out organisations which would meet the place-based criteria taking into account geography and groupings not yet included in the programme. This was undertaken by the assessor. Two further organisation were subsequently awarded funding.



## SECTION 3

# evaluation methodology

### 3.1 Rationale

As an organisation SSGT is committed to sharing learning around its grantmaking programmes with other interested agencies and funders. This report is part of its commitment to this, of reflecting on its programming and being accountable to those it funds and its funders.

In addition, as a pilot grantmaking programme in a new area of work, SSGT viewed an external evaluation as critical in enabling it to deepen its understanding and knowledge in particular of the contribution of community based initiatives to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. It was also intended that commissioning a formative evaluation which would take place over the life of the programme would inform SSGT's thinking on whether and how this area of work might be developed.

### 3.2 Approach

A range of projects using a variety of approaches were funded under SIPA working with different constituencies and age ranges led by organisations of varying size, capacity and evaluation experience. They were all, however, working towards very similar goals and outcomes. As such at the outset, it was decided as far as possible to identify or develop straightforward tools which could be used across projects to collect evidence on the extent to which the programme aims were met.

The overall approach was informed by a number of models. It incorporated the concept of 'distance travelled from the IDRC Outcome Mapping model'<sup>21</sup>. The IDRC approach is highly sensitive to the complexities of what constitutes 'progress' in sometimes highly challenging situations. This means recognising that for different communities, the starting point, the issues and challenges, and the end point may be very different. This informed the development of a simple tool to be completed by participants at the beginning and at the end of the projects to chart change in line with the SIPA outcomes it was hoped to achieve.

The approach was also informed by the social capital model in considering changes within and across communities. In particular, the levels at which community

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<sup>21</sup> Earl, S, Carden, F and Smutylo, T. (2001) *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*. Ottawa: IDRC.

groups function and achieve change conceptualised as bonding, bridging and linking.<sup>22</sup> Bonding refers to the ways in which we trust and relate to others who are like us; Bridging is about trust and relationships between individuals and groups who are unlike each other; and Linking concerns the quality of relations across social classes or between communities and decision makers. While the SIPA outcomes largely relate to bonding and bridging, consideration was also given to capturing examples of linking between communities and decision makers.

Finally, the approach was informed by the results, process, relationships approach developed by the Interaction Institute for Social Change. This proposes that evaluation take account of three dimensions of success: results (outcomes achieved), process (how the work was done) and relationships (how people feel about their involvement and the extent to which they are willing to continue working with each other).

### 3.3 Methodology

#### 3.3.1. Objectives and methods used

The overall aim of the evaluation was to identify learning from the programme and in particular to:

- Capture the outcomes of the projects funded in a proportionate way;
- Support grantees, SSGT and the Advisory Group to critically reflect on the establishment and operation of SIPA; and
- Reflect on how learning from SIPA might inform SSGT's future work to make a contribution to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

A series of core evaluation questions were agreed with SSGT to be addressed by the evaluation process which in broad terms related to: results – what was achieved; process – how the work was done; and relationships developed both by the grantees and SSGT.

The main elements of the methodology and sources of information used to inform the evaluation process were:

- A brief literature review on the current context in Northern Ireland and the role of grass roots peacebuilding.
- Discussions at three convenings of grantees through Learning Network Meetings to discuss their work and reflect on and share learning. These occurred at an early stage to discuss how they might capture the impact of their work, at the end of year 1 with a final meeting at the end of year 2 of the programme.

<sup>22</sup> Morrissey, M Healy, K and McDonnell, B (2009) *Social Assets Summary Report: A New Approach to Understanding and Working with Communities*. Belfast: CENI.

- Annual written reports from grantees on their reflections on the work over the last year, activities carried out and the change their work had contributed to together with challenges faced. As part of this process they collected feedback from participants through a simple rating scale designed to capture 'distance travelled' (see Appendix 2). This asked participants to rate themselves on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always) on questions directly related to the change it was hoped might be achieved through SIPA around increased activism and confidence in making change and working with people from different cultural or religious backgrounds. The questionnaires, which were co-designed with grantees during the first Learning Network Meeting, were given out by the project workers at the beginning of their work to provide a baseline measure and then at the end of their projects to enable an assessment of any change. This was supplemented by material collected by the projects from personal stories, case studies and their own observations of change.
- A series of telephone discussions with grantees on their annual reports and with the local assessor who visited two of the projects to assist them with their annual reports.
- Regular discussions with the SSGT Executive Director, annual interviews with the Executive Director and the Chair of the Advisory Group and discussions had with the Advisory Group over the course of the programme.

### 3.3.2. Limitations

The rating scale to assess distance travelled by project participants worked well for the majority of the projects which were working with the same group of people over a period of time. These provided an additional measure of change in addition to the perceptions and reflections of project workers and little support was needed following on from an initial co-design session with grantees at the outset of SIPA. They also provided a means of comparison across the youth and women's sector projects.

It was accepted that a different approach would be needed for the place based dialogue projects and that more reliance would need to be placed on project reports. While at the outset both projects felt they could use the questionnaires for some of their workshop and training work it became clear towards the end of year one that these were not being used. Further work with the project workers to develop a simple one page pro-forma to capture the reflections of facilitators delivering workshops was carried out at the end of year one but in the main was not used by the projects. To a large extent then, the evaluation of the place-based projects relied on the reports of project workers and the reflections of the external assessor who knows the work of both groups well.

## SECTION 4

# what was funded and who took part

## 4.1 Overview

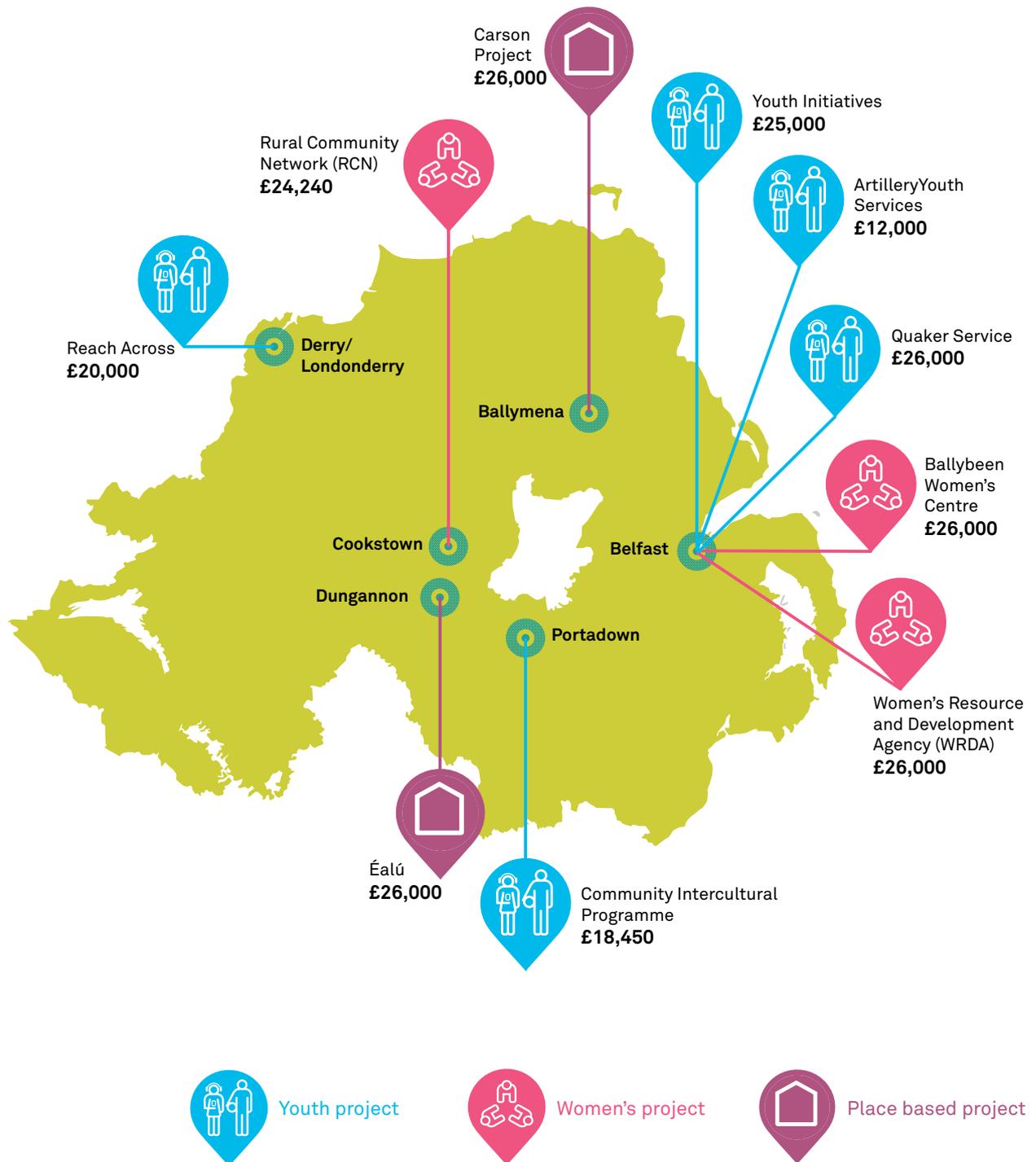
Half of the organisations funded were based in Belfast and worked in the Belfast area. Three of the organisations funded based in Dungannon, Ballymena and Cookstown worked locally and in other areas. The Selfie project (RCN) worked in Cookstown, Ballymoney and Armagh. The Carson Project worked largely across the Ballymena and North Antrim area and Éalú largely across the Dungannon and East Tyrone area.

All of the projects worked with participants living in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland that had been severely impacted by the conflict.

The majority of projects worked with participants from local PUL and CRN communities. The Boss Project worked with equal numbers of PUL, CRN and BME young people living in the Portadown area. The two place-based projects worked with individuals and groups within their own communities including BME groups and between communities with those from different religious or cultural traditions.

A range of different approaches were used. Some including the majority of the youth projects ran two one year programmes working with different groups in each year. WRDA and the Quaker Service worked with the same group over the two year period while Éalú and Carson Project were involved in a range of one off events and workshops, training and on-going dialogue with other groups. As such there was considerable diversity in terms of the intensity of engagement ranging from projects delivering short courses and one off events for large numbers of participants through to projects engaging at a deeper level over the longer term working with a smaller number of people.

**Table 1: What was funded**



## 4.2 Project clusters

### 4.2.1. Young people's projects

#### BEYOND SECTARIANISM

The *Beyond Sectarianism* project is one of a number of inter-community youth work projects in areas of high social need delivered by Youth Initiatives. *Beyond Sectarianism* worked with young people aged 15 and above largely from the PUL Inner East Belfast and CNR Poleglass, Lagmore and Twinbrook areas of Belfast. It was run twice with different participants in each year in the evenings and at weekends. Work began bringing the young people together in a residential. They then went on to volunteer on a weekly basis in projects in their own communities though came together regularly as a group for events and for leadership and good relations training. The programme finished each year with the young people acting as leaders for an inter-community summer scheme for children aged 11–14. Around 40 young people took part each year.

#### BOSS PROJECT

The Community Intercultural Programme was established in 2006 in response to the emerging needs of BME communities in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon areas. In partnership with Ballyoran Youth Club which works in the local CNR community and Scotch Street Youth and Community Centre which works in the local PUL community, it established *BOSS* six years ago primarily as a summer intervention programme. The SSGT funded *BOSS* Project was an extension of that work. It was run twice with different participants in each year in the evening. Each of the partners recruited young people aged 11–14 who then worked together as a group during the project. Work was carried out over three phases: teambuilding trips and exercises; training and preparing for leadership roles in the *BOSS* summer scheme; and designing and delivering a social action project as a group. In year 1 this was an anti-bullying project using drama staged in different areas of Portadown. In year 2 the group decided they wanted to focus on mental health and well-being and designed a poster documenting ways to wellbeing for use in their schools. 25 young people took part in year 1 and 22 in year 2.

#### YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME

Artillery Youth Services works with young adults and their families from disadvantaged communities most impacted by the conflict in lower North Belfast. It has been centrally involved in grass roots peacebuilding amongst young adults disengaged from their communities including with those either involved with or at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. The *Young Leaders Programme* provided a programme of training, volunteering and opportunities for designing and delivering community based projects. It worked with young people aged 18+ from PUL and CNR communities in lower North Belfast.

## CASE STUDY

### Young Leaders Programme – Artillery Youth Services

The Young Leaders Programme aimed to build capacity of disengaged young people who have the potential to play a leadership role and exert influence among their peers within the Tigers Bay (PUL) and New Lodge (CNR) areas of Belfast.

The project worked with a group of 12 different young people from both areas each year in a leadership programme provided two nights each week. This was structured to provide accredited training including Leadership and Youth Work and non-accredited training in a range of areas including in good relations and conflict resolution, governance and community leadership. In the first year, the majority of participants were young men. In the second all of the participants were young women, the majority young mothers. This gender breakdown occurred by 'accident rather than design' but was assessed by the project working as having '*added something to the programme in terms of immediately recognisable life experiences beyond division or cultural division*'.

In year 1 the training was delivered first and young people then asked to work together on community projects. In light of experience, changes were made in year 2 to integrate the training and practice elements more over the course of the year which worked well. Over the two year period in addition to volunteering in their local communities, the young people worked together to design and deliver a range of initiatives for both communities including inter-community family fun days, community clean ups and a football tournament.

In year 2, the project was running during a period of heightened tensions within and between communities culminating in violence between young people and the police around an anti-internment bonfire in the New Lodge area. While the broader context has been a difficult environment for good relations work it was reported that '*if anything these challenges spurred our group on to deliver meaningful community initiatives and to demonstrate that despite what was happening around the area, that normal friendships, comradery and cooperation were stronger than the issues that appeared to divide and challenge communities*'.

Prior to taking part most of the young people were not in work or training and were '*for the most part disengaged from community life*'. Their confidence in changing things in their own community and about working with people from different cultural or religious backgrounds grew significantly over the course of the project. A particular achievement was that they all completed the programme and gained level 2 qualifications in youth work.



Artillery has maintained contact with the young people from year 1 of the programme and most remain active as volunteers in Artillery or other community projects. Relationships made between participants appear to be continuing.

Artillery is incorporating the learning from the programme into its other areas of work. In addition, based on its experience in year 2, it has identified a need for work with young parents. This is being taken forward by one of the young women who took part in the project in year 2 who has started work with Artillery and is developing a project for a group of young parents all aged 21 or under.



### GREAT PROJECT

Reach Across has a long track record in delivering inter-community contact opportunities for young people in Derry/Londonderry. Its GREAT Project provided a number of programmes for young people. This included opportunities for young people aged 14-17 from different religious backgrounds to meet through taking part in a residential. 4 separate residential were held each year. The funding also supported accredited shared learning courses in schools on topics relating to good relations and citizenship. Young people completed preparatory work in their own schools and then engaged in a shared learning session with young people from a different tradition. An after school programme for 16-17 year olds provided an opportunity for young people from the PUL and CNR communities to learn about issues relating to good relations, citizenship and leadership. Project participants were also invited to attend three development workshops which included hearing the personal stories of those impacted by the conflict. The programme encourages active citizenship through making participants aware of additional development and volunteering opportunities in the community. Some participants have volunteered in an annual Reach Across summer scheme and or taken part in international youth exchanges. Overall, the project worked with 250 young people in year 1 and nearly 240 in year 2 the majority of whom took part in the residential.

### MYSTORY/YOUR STORY

The *My Story* project is an initiative of Quaker Service based at Quaker Cottage which provides a range of services to children and families at risk or in need in North and West Belfast. The project was designed to work with a group of PUL and CRN young people aged 14–25 in a storytelling project to coincide with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GFA. The aim was to document their lives and the issues they and their families are facing in the post conflict society and to document this through film, photography, stories and art. It was intended that in the second year of the project, the young people would develop and deliver a campaign for change around the issues from the report. In the first year, 10 young people from Quaker Cottage met once a week to co-produce the storytelling project. A decision was taken to work in partnership with Homeplus to include the voices of refugees and asylum seekers and four additional young people took part. The groups worked together to tell their stories and produce a *My Story* report which has been published and short film highlighting the issues raised<sup>23</sup>. Both illustrated the significant socio economic issues that young people are facing and in particular the level of mental health issues experienced and the lack of support and services. The report was launched in the Northern Ireland Assembly and four of the young people spoke at the event. The majority of those who were involved in the story telling project have gone on in year 2, to develop a youth-led mental health campaign #MyStory YourStory. The campaign is now up and running led by a core team of 24 young people. To date work has included developing a social media campaign, outreach workshops and sessions in schools and youth centres co-facilitated by the young people, a short film to highlight the mental health crisis produced in conjunction with the Playhouse Theatre, peaceful protests and door to door canvassing.



23 The *My Story* report and short film developed by the project are available from the Quaker Service at [http://www.quakerservice.com/Quaker\\_Service/My\\_Story.html](http://www.quakerservice.com/Quaker_Service/My_Story.html) A toolkit on the role of storytelling for social change is nearing completion.

#### 4.2.2. Women's sector projects

##### **NORTH BELFAST WOMEN'S VOICES**

The *North Belfast Women's Voices* project built on research commissioned by WRDA which charted the experience of women from five women's groups in North Belfast and the issues that were important to them around identity, culture, flags and parades. The aim of the project was to take the findings of the research forward and create a Women's Charter that would suggest different approaches to these entrenched problems. While it had been planned to work with all five of these groups, this did not prove possible and the project worked with two of the original women's groups over a two year period involving participants from the PUL and CRN communities. The work began with an informal meeting, a workshop and then a residential focused on exploring the research and what the project aimed to do. This was followed by a series of workshops usually held on a monthly basis to explore the personal, structural and community barriers to change. Topics included: difference and othering; assertiveness; human rights; health and gender inequality and critical literacy. It was hoped that shared learning would draw out the commonality of the women's experience which would provide a more positive context for discussion around more contentious issues. The Charter was developed over a final residential and follow up meeting and was launched during the 2019 Good Relations Week<sup>24</sup>. A core group of 17 women took part in the project over the two year period.

##### **TIME FOR ME, TIME FOR US**

The *Time for Me, Time for Us* project was a collaborative learning programme run by Ballybeen Women's Centre for women in the local area (PUL) and those engaged with Footprints Women's Centre located in the CNR Poleglass area. The project aimed to provide joint learning opportunities for women from different backgrounds to build knowledge, tolerance and understanding and equip them with skills and confidence to participate in community leadership. The project ran twice over the two year period with a new intake each year though some women who took part in year 1 carried on into year 2. The project began with a workshop held separately in each women's centre. This was then followed by joint events, workshops, training and visits to each of the centres. For logistical reasons, the training elements were provided one morning a week over a number of weeks in neutral venues in Belfast city centre as it was easier and cheaper for the women to get to them. Training included work on history and cultures, exploring culture through art and empowerment and leadership. 76 women took part in year 1 and 77 women in year 2.

##### **SELFIE**

The SELFIE project was an inter-community programme for women which aimed to build capacity and empower women in rural communities to be active participants in building peace at a local level in four geographical areas; Cookstown, Omagh, Ballymoney and Armagh. It was delivered by a partnership of four organisations: Rural Community Network, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, REACT Armagh and Building Communities Resource Centre.

<sup>24</sup> The Charter is available from WRDA at <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NB-WOMENS-VOICES-report.pdf>

## CASE STUDY

### SELFIE project – Rural Community Network



The SELFIE project began as a response to a lack of support for women in rural areas generally and for the development of community leadership. The specific trigger for the programme was the funding allocations made by a programme to increase the participation and influence of women in community development under the recent Fresh Start Agreement. This concentrated funding in the Belfast area with little provision for women in rural areas.

The SELFIE project was designed to provide a short training and development programme for women. It was hoped to provide this programme in four locations, two in each year, across rural Northern Ireland in areas facing peace building challenges. The project aimed to recruit women who were working to make a difference but doing so largely unsupported or unconnected to others in this work. It was hoped to foster networks and relationships between participants in the different areas the project would operate through a residential at the end of each year and a final residential for all participants.

The programme consisted of workshops on a range of issues including: self-esteem, confidence building, assertiveness, community development practices and social justice issues. It was delivered one day a week over a six week period in each location to women from different community backgrounds.

A number of challenges were faced as the programme rolled out. Despite the best efforts of the project worker and partners, it was not possible to recruit in the Omagh area so the programme was delivered in the Cookstown area only in year one. While it had been expected to attract women already active in their communities, in the main women expressing an interest in the project were not engaged at community level. *'The project had to work with who came forward. Most wanted to be active at community level but didn't know how to go about it. So it didn't work out as planned but we decided there was work to do to build capacity.'*

It has proved, however, to be 'transformational' for those who participated with women reported as being more confident to engage at community level and feeling able to take up roles within the community. Many are now active in community groups, sporting clubs and schools and two stood as candidates in the recent local council elections. All have progressed into education or training, volunteering or working for change in their communities. Strong relationships have been made by women from different communities and are being maintained. While the project has come to an end, the participants continue to be supported at a local level by each of the four project partners.

The project has recently been successful in obtaining support from the Peace IV programme to replicate and scale up the model of work developed across the mid-Ulster area.

### 4.2.3. Place-based projects

#### ÉALÚ

Based in Dungannon ÉALÚ works at a local level to promote dialogue and community activism among those most impacted by the conflict. It provides training, advice, support and signposting services and as part of this has built relationships with local statutory agencies particular around mental health services. It runs a Men's Shed project which has developed a small social economy project making bodhrans and mini-cottages. Its *Civic Dialogue and Peacebuilding Programme* was a capacity building and outreach programme which aimed to foster positive dialogue and relationships within CNR communities and between CNR and PUL communities in the East Tyrone, Fermanagh Border area and in South Armagh. It worked with people and groups within and across areas which have been significantly impacted by the conflict. The project aimed to build confidence, relationships and effective activism through workshops, events and dialogue. It has been involved in relationship building including with groups marginalised from peacebuilding within the local CNR community and those in the PUL community. It has also been involved in mediating and fostering dialogue around issues creating community tensions such as bonfire, flags and emblems and Brexit. Through its events, workshops and dialogue it has had more than 200 attendees each year in the Dungannon area with further numbers attending events organised elsewhere.

#### CARSON PROJECT

The Carson Project is based in the Harryville area of Ballymena. It works within the local PUL community but also engages widely to promote better relations and community activism across the Mid-Antrim area. It works with statutory services to deal with difficult community issues and to develop services and activities to engage local communities.

## CASE STUDY

### Deeper Dialogue Programme – Carson Project



The *Deeper Dialogue Programme* aimed to build on previous joint dialogue and work with Leafair Community Association based in a CNR community in the Shantallow area of Derry/Londonderry. This used the 'Decade of Centenaries' to bring people from both communities together to explore difficult issues from the past and present from both perspectives. The *Deeper Dialogue Programme* aimed to build on this by developing relationships with a range of groups in each area through dialogue, workshops and events and then providing opportunities for people to engage in inter-community events and visits to explore difficult, contentious or legacy issues from the recent conflict.

While engagement with Leafair continued over the course of the project through a number of joint residentials and site visits including to an Ulster Scots group, the focus of the project was on relationship building and dialogue within the local PUL community and between the local PUL and CNR communities. Over the two year period inter-community programmes focused on history and legacy issues were held including: with two PUL and CRN schools; collaborative events such as a 'Peace in the Park' event run during Good Relations week in 2019; and presentations and dialogue sessions for local groups on key events in British and Irish history.

Dialogue and mediation took place with groups across the political spectrum on a range of contentious issues. This produced some positive outcomes around bonfires and flags, anti-social behaviour and community tensions between the local population and migrant workers.

Work also progressed in fostering community activism around social issues within the PUL community. A community forum is developing to support joint work on some key concerns which will provide a mechanism to link the community with local elected representatives.

The work has not been without difficulty as a range of factors have increased tension in parts of both communities. However, the project has been able to engage a growing number of people and groups through events and discussion. 350 people attended its workshops and events in year 2.

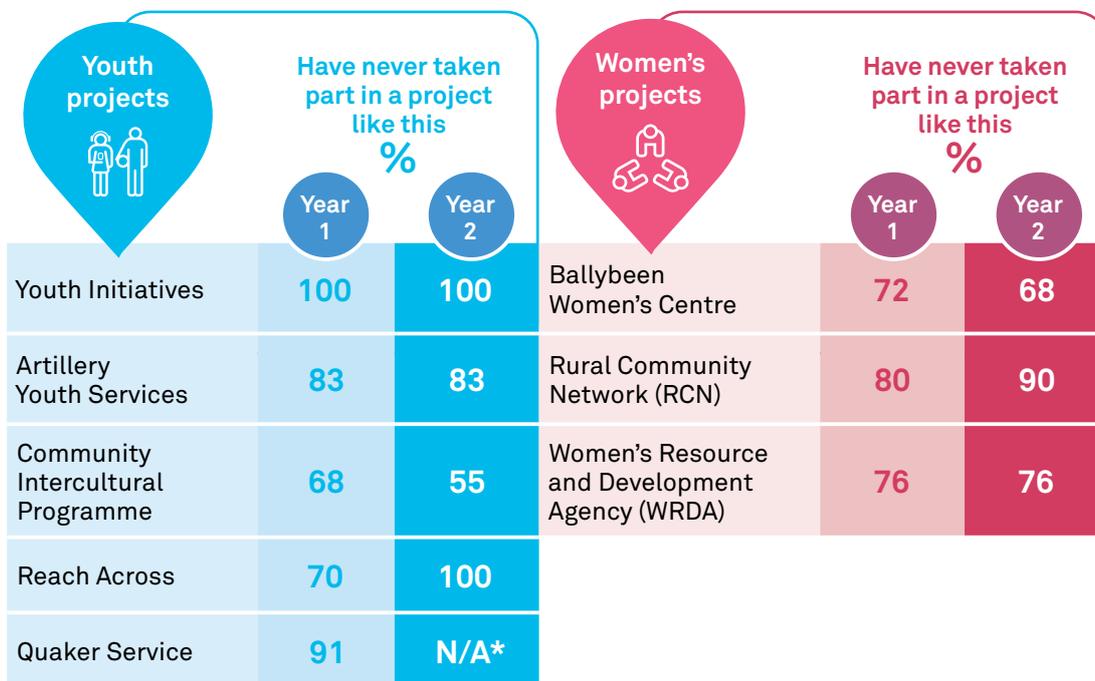


The Carson Project wants to build on this work by giving a greater focus to fostering community activism and participation on the big social issues in the area including drug misuse, mental health, anti-social behaviour and lack of opportunity for young people.

### 4.3. Participants

All of the projects worked with PUL and CRN participants and most with around equal numbers of each. While there is some variation from year to year the SIPA projects seem to have reached people who have not had an opportunity to work alongside those from a different cultural or religious background. Based on the questionnaires completed by those who took part in the youth and women’s sector projects, the majority reported they had never taken part in a project like this before.

**Table 2: Who took part in youth and women’s projects**



\*While information was collected from project participants in year 2, this was not available from the project.

Through social action initiatives, community events and activities, summer schemes and volunteering, the reach of the programme was much wider. For example, the MyStory/YourStory campaign now underway has worked with nearly 300 young people in outreach work in schools and youth clubs over July and August in 2019. The young people who took part in the project run by Artillery Youth Services designed and delivered inter-community projects which included a family fun day attended by 230 parents and children and a trip to Dublin zoo attended by 84 parents and children.

The place-based projects reported that they attracted people who would not have previously engaged to workshops and other events within and between communities. Similarly their community dialogue work and meetings fostered discussions between groups which would have not previously engaged. Both reported having engaged with significant numbers of people through this work.

## SECTION 5

# the difference made to individuals, organisations and communities

### 5.1. Individual participants

#### 5.1.1. Overview

Participants in the youth and women's projects completed a 'distance travelled' rating scale in response to a number of statements (outlined below) which drew directly from the outcomes it was hoped SIPA would achieve. These were completed at the beginning of projects, to get a baseline, and at the end. Compared to baseline scores, there was a small positive shift in ratings across projects in all the SIPA outcome areas in both years. Overall, the degree of change ranged from an increase of 0.8 to 1.7 in ratings most often moving ratings from below to above the mid-point of the scale.

Increases in ratings varied across projects and from year to year. However, ratings in some projects showed more significant change. There was a tendency for higher increases from baseline ratings in projects which worked more intensely with participants over a longer period.

Further information on individual change was also gathered from the observations of project workers including those from the two place-based projects which did not use the rating scales. The findings are summarised below.

## 5.1.2. Areas of change

### **Taking part in groups or activities with people from different backgrounds**

It is difficult to tell to what extent the increase in ratings reflected the opportunities for engagement provided by the projects or more general changes in behaviour. However, additional information from the project workers provides evidence of people making friendships and engaging in activities on an inter-community basis outside of the programming provided by projects. Many examples were given including of young people meeting up in Belfast city centre at weekends or taking advantage of the new Glider bus service that provides for the first time a direct link between the West and East of the city to visit friends made through the projects; women meeting up informally or enrolling on courses together; and one group of friendships resulting in the setting up of a weekly group.

The two place-based dialogue projects engaged a significant number of people who have never been offered the opportunity to hear from a different community background or perspective. Both projects reported that most of those who took part were new to peacebuilding or community development and that those attending had indicated a willingness to attend future events. The ongoing dialogue work was reported by both projects as having fostered positive relationships within and between local communities.

Funding from SSGT also supported some aspects of a broader programme of work by one of the place-based projects focussed on addressing legacy issues of the conflict – such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, poor mental health, addiction and domestic violence. This work has proved critical to those who for a range of economic, social, political and cultural reasons have not trusted mainstream services.

### **Taking part in activities or giving time to organisations to help make life better in my community and/or for people in other communities**

Participants were asked to rate themselves on the extent to which they are involved in work within their own communities and also work which benefited their own and other communities. The increase in ratings in response to both questions was supported by the observations of the project workers. A range of examples were given of the increased participation and activism of people when their projects came to an end. Many of the young people progressed to other programmes including leadership programmes and international exchanges. Others went on to volunteer in their own communities or acted as peer mentors, facilitators or young leaders in the second year of the projects. Examples from the women's projects included: people beginning work with shared history projects or projects focused on dialogue about contentious issues; or of women beginning to get involved in community and sporting groups or training in facilitation to enable them to deliver programmes on an inter-community basis.

The positive impact of relationships which have developed from dialogue and discussion, was mentioned by both place-based projects. The positive relationships

which now exist between individuals in groups in both communities mean that when incidents or contentious issues arise which have the potential to ignite or escalate community tension, these can be dealt with quickly '*before they get out of hand*'. The development of relationships has also opened up opportunities for collaborative work within communities on a broader range of issues around housing, education, mental health and anti-social behaviour.

### **Confidence about influencing or changing things in own community and working with people from different backgrounds to work for a positive change for everyone**

Ratings of confidence in both areas increased by the end of all projects, in some cases from quite a low base. In the main, ratings indicate higher levels of confidence about working with people from different cultural or religious backgrounds than about influencing change in participants' own communities.

Examples of how this increased confidence has contributed to change in individual behaviour reported by project workers include young people challenging sectarian language or behaviour at school or gaining the confidence to address meetings on issues that affect young people in their community. One project worker described how they had been 'taken aback' by the confidence shown by young people from both communities who worked together to design and deliver an inter-community event in a PUL area on the 11th of July.

Project workers reported those taking part in the women's sector projects have gained the confidence to begin to discuss difficult and contentious issues on an inter-community basis and small but significant steps having been made; such as having the confidence to go to events in areas and communities they would never have considered going to before.

### **Sustainability of relationships made**

Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the relationships and friendships they had made during their projects with people from a different cultural or religious background would continue after the project came to an end. The majority indicated that they thought these would continue.

## 5.2. Organisations

There was evidence of the funded projects strengthening relationships between organisations within and between communities or of new relationships being forged. This was less apparent in the youth sector projects though a number of groups reported strengthened relationships with schools in which the work had been delivered or with organisations they had brought in to deliver talks or facilitate discussions.

The women's sector projects reported strengthened relationships between the inter-community partners involved in delivering the projects or with women's groups involved in projects. This has led to the partners of one of the projects working together to develop a larger scale project building on the SSGT funded work and successfully applying for funding. The other projects hope to continue their relationship with the partners and groups involved in the SSGT funded work and collaborate on other projects.

Relationship building at an organisational level was strongly in evidence among the place-based projects with new relationships forged within and between communities and existing relationships strengthened.

## 5.3. Communities

Most of the projects funded were focused on providing individuals with an opportunity to engage on an inter-community basis and build activism, participation, confidence and leadership skills. This has been achieved though in most cases it is impossible to say what community impacts may emerge from this experience or relationships built. Where examples of community impact were given these were most often seen in terms of participants contributing to a 'ripple effect' at a local level through their increased confidence to engage at an inter-community level or to challenge people within their own communities to think differently or at least to try and see things from a different perspective.

More concrete examples of community level impact were reported by the place-based projects. A wide range of examples were reported of their contribution in successfully reducing community tensions around contentious issues such as parades, relations between the local and new BME communities and brokering working agreements around bonfires and flags. Both are also fostering increased participation and activism around a broader range of social issues within their communities; for example through contributing to the development of residents groups, contributing to the creation of a community forum to address issues of concern around local services including community planning or advocacy for improved mental health services. An important element of this work has been to leverage relationships made with statutory service providers and local elected representatives to build links with the local community.

## SECTION 6

# learning

### 6.1. Learning from the projects

#### 6.1.1. Challenges

SIPA got underway at a time of great uncertainty. The Northern Ireland Executive collapsed a few months before the programme launch and the outworking of the Brexit vote of 2016 was beginning to be felt. The latter has provided the context for the reopening of conversations about a border poll, brought issues around cultural identity to the fore and heightened old divisions.

While this backdrop did not affect the ability of grantees to continue to deliver their projects, the impact of this unstable environment on local communities and good relations work was clear particularly in year 2 of the programme. This was manifested in a number of ways. For example, while taking part in the projects gave people confidence to participate in their communities and engage with people in other communities, at the same time some project workers reported what they viewed as ‘a sense of pessimism’ within marginalised communities about the possibility of positive change.

Project  
Worker

“They just don’t have any faith they will be listened to. We can talk but we need people to pay attention to what we are saying.”

A strong theme reported is a disconnect between disadvantaged communities and elected representatives with project workers reporting that people feel they have no voice and that they have become disillusioned with politics and political representatives.

Project  
Worker

“There is just a lack of leadership locally and a lack of any structured discussion between community groups and councillors.”

Project  
Worker

“We need people to listen to what communities are saying but no-one is listening.”

What was seen as a lack of leadership by local representatives and political parties generally was perceived as having contributed to a lack of direction

for good relations work. While this is carrying on at community level, it was seen as doing so in a vacuum and in the absence of other more structural changes which have stalled.

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“There is no leadership to be found in anything. Shared housing and education plans have come to nothing yet groups on the ground are being asked to work on good relations. So this work feels a bit powerless...Good relations work motors on but there’s no coherent direction. We need action.”

Project Worker

“Young people want to see change and are frustrated that there is no-one trying to bring this about or represent their views.”

Project Worker

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The fear and uncertainty brought about by Brexit came through many of the projects. For example, project workers reflected the concerns of young people who are worried about the implications of Brexit for their future and what impact it will have on their opportunities. This was a particular issue for BME participants.

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“They are feeling a lot of stress and there is a lot of stress at home too. Some were born here to parents born abroad so there is a lot of confusion about whether they will be able to stay or have to move away.”

Project Worker

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At a community level, it was reported that the effect of the current political impasse and on-going Brexit negotiations has resulted in a ‘hardening of positions’ and a more difficult environment for peacebuilding and good relations impacting on people’s willingness to engage in this work. At the same time, the trend of a growing islamophobia and negative rhetoric around migrants was reported as having led to a surfacing of prejudiced views about BME groups who are blamed for social problems within some communities. Gatekeeping, the process where those with influence work to control what happens in their communities, was a key challenge for one project and was at work in some others. Projects had to spend time to carefully navigate a way round opposition to the work from community leaders.

### 6.1.2. Effective practice

The funded projects used a variety of approaches ranging from short, time limited opportunities to meet with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds to more intensive structured engagement, leadership development and training. Within the diversity of approach and methodology, it is possible to identify some elements of practice which worked well and which were used successfully to mitigate some of the challenges of peacebuilding at this time:

- **Providing space for people to bond and identify common concerns:** many of the projects built in team building, residential or informal social events at the beginning of projects to provide the space for people to get to know each other and build trust before going on to formal training, workshops, social action initiatives or to explore contentious issues.

Project  
Worker

“Women really enjoyed the experience coming together to both learn and share experiences with each other. They also appreciated the social element to the programme as this facilitated opportunities to build relations on a personal level and talk about issues that affect women on an everyday basis e.g. family, money etc.”

A number of projects reported that what worked well in terms of helping people to bond and build trust was supporting them to identify and explore issues that impact on everyone regardless of community or cultural background. Developing these foundations was reported by one group as having provided ‘a better foothold into tackling issues around which there was so much division and hurt’.

- **Taking time for pre-project engagement planning and relationship building:** this was particularly helpful for work involving partners to enable them to build trust. One group also found this helpful in establishing a base of trust between participants from two different organisations as a precursor to the project getting up and running.
- **Taking a flexible approach to programme delivery:** including, as described by one project worker, ‘starting where people are at’, moving at their pace, understanding that the level of engagement and time people can commit will vary at times, and, importantly, changing tack in light of experience and emerging challenges. In some cases this required making changes to the design of the project to meet the needs of those who expressed an interest in the work or pausing and building in specific training to overcome challenges.
- **Building in an element of co-design in what is delivered:** a number of projects demonstrated how developing projects in conjunction with participants can be a powerful tool in empowering participants and fostering engagement.

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“We asked young people what the big issues are that older people may not be aware of. The main issue was mental health and they decided to focus the work on this.”

Project Worker

“We weren’t prescriptive. We sat down with both groups and asked them what they wanted to get out of the programme and where they would like to see things by the end of the year.”

Project Worker

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- **The power of story-telling as a mechanism to engage young people:** A number of projects highlighted the power of story-telling as an effective and empowering way of working with young people. This included hearing the stories of those who have been most impacted by the conflict or telling their own stories.

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“Doing this project has really opened my eyes to the lives of other young people in Belfast. I was able to relate to other people’s stories. This taught me I am not alone and that young people around my age have experienced similar issues that I went through. This brought us closer and made our passion for young people’s mental wellbeing stronger. In our society nowadays although mental health, depression and suicide are seen and looked on as the norm, going through this project made us realise that it is far from the norm and that something needs to be done about it and change needs to happen soon rather than later.”

Project Participant

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- **Working in an inclusive way:** this emerged as an important factor in particular for work concerned with resolving contentious issues at a local level.

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“We feel the approach we took of including all interested parties in dialogue and discussion on certain issues where those interested parties could have an influence was very beneficial. Involving these groups/individuals helped to reduce exclusion and also these groups/individuals could then help reduce fears and tensions in their own respective communities.”

Project Worker

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- **Informal support when the project came to an end:** a number of the projects continued to provide support on an informal basis to participants when the funded work had come to an end to enable them to build on what they had learned. This included signposting people to opportunities for volunteering locally or to opportunities to enable them to develop their leadership and skills further.

## 6.2. Learning from the SIPA process

### 6.2.1. The value of engaging local expertise

A decision was taken at an early stage to establish an Advisory Group for what would be a new area of work for SSGT. The Advisory Group contributed to the design of SIPA and its experience and expertise was reported to be invaluable. In particular in the early planning stages of the project broadening the reach of the programme from what one member coined 'the usual suspects'. The group also contributed to the development of the practical administrative arrangements for SIPA including criteria, the application process and marketing of the programme and the final assessment of applications. In addition to expertise, members brought local knowledge and relationships which SSGT did not have at the outset of SIPA which assisted greatly at the assessment stage of the process.

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 and enabled the identification of two additional place-based groups. It was reported that appointing an evaluator with local knowledge was also important to the evaluation process.

### 6.2.2. The need to build in sufficient time for programme design and implementation

Because of internal constraints, the SIPA programme was developed and rolled out under significant pressure of time. A longer time frame would have allowed for more critical reflection at the design stage and in the planning for administrative arrangements for the roll out of the programme. For example, more time may have enabled the development of greater clarity at an early stage around how SIPA might relate to the SCI Fellowship Programme also funded by Porticus. In particular this might have enabled more in-depth discussion around the potential synergies between the two programmes and discussion on the process by which the projects could work together. Discussion on these issues did take place in spring 2018 and two participants from the SIPA programme engaged with the SCI Fellowship Programme; one taking up a Fellowship, another mentored under the programme. It was reported, however, that there was further scope for collaboration that had not been realised.

### 6.2.3. Learning from the cluster approach

A decision was taken during the planning process for SIPA to build a cluster approach into the pilot programme as it was considered that this would offer the potential to explore how SIPA has worked in different issues and contexts.

While there have been differences in the approach to peacebuilding across clusters, what has been a striking feature of the programme has been the extent to which groups 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. Having the opportunity to meet through the Learning Network Meetings enabled groups from different sectors to share their specific perspectives and expertise with groups from other sectors.

#### 6.2.4. The value of SSGT’s grantmaking approach

From a grantee perspective, SSGT’s approach to grantmaking was perceived as comparing favourably in relation to the practice of other grant programmes and in particular the current Peace IV programme.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to Peace IV perceived by grantees as unwieldy, unjustifiably bureaucratic and as having been built around prescriptive and inflexible models of change, SSGT’s approach was viewed as supportive and flexible. The flexibility shown by SSGT to projects which needed to deviate slightly from or refocus plans set out in original applications in light of experience or in response to specific challenges was highly valued and seen as likely to contribute to better outcomes in the longer term. Participants welcomed in particular SSGT’s approach to reporting assessed as having been appropriate and proportionate. However, SSGT’s requirement that groups complete a further application for year 2 funding caused some disquiet among groups. This was because they had assumed funding had been confirmed for two years and had made financial commitments on that basis.

The view was expressed that while the resources available under initiatives like SIPA may be relatively modest in comparison to programmes like Peace IV, there is a real need for such smaller scale funding opportunities which can be more flexible and which allow organisations the time and space to respond to issues in the most appropriate manner including working with participants to co-design programmes. Ultimately these will offer better prospects of real impact.

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“ A big plus for us has been being able to experiment and take the learning into our other work. The support from SSGT has enabled us to do things we wouldn’t have done previously. It was a modest amount of funding but produced very good outcomes.”



“ If SSGT funding wasn’t there we wouldn’t have been able to do the work to the same level. It’s a relatively small amount of funding but without it we would have made less progress.”



<sup>25</sup> Launched in 1995 and aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society in Northern Ireland and the Border region, the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation has gone through a number of iterations. The current Peace IV programme was launched in 2014 and will run to 2020. This has a strong alignment with the Northern Ireland Executive’s current strategy for improving community relations and building a shared society – Together: Building a United Community Strategy – and has moved towards an enhanced role for public sector bodies in the distribution and delivery of services and outcomes focused approaches.

Project  
Worker

“SIPA shows what can be achieved with even a small amount of funding. Any peacebuilding initiative can fall flat on its face at the minute. There is always an element of risk and it’s important that funders are around that can support this work.”

### 6.2.5. The value of Learning Network meetings as a mechanism to share learning

SIPA was designed to include opportunities for grantees to come together in Learning Network Meetings three times over the life of the programme. These seem to have fulfilled their purpose of providing grantees with the opportunity to network and reflect on and share learning and experiences about their work. Feedback about the value of these meetings was very positive and included that:

- Learning Network Meetings have provided an opportunity for groups, which share similar values and aims, to network and engage with people from other sectors they would not normally meet to share learning and experiences;
- That building in these meetings into the SIPA programme has enabled small community groups, under constant pressure in a shrinking funding environment to maintain the delivery of their services, with the opportunity and ‘permission’ to take time out and reflect on their work with their peers;
- The discussions had at meetings have been 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 other sectors which could inform their own work.

There was certainly evidence of good sharing of information on useful contacts and sources of help on specific issues at the meetings. It was reported that having more frequent meetings would have been useful to provide the space for project workers to reflect on their practice. It was also suggested that an on-line forum might have been a useful way of enabling project workers communicate with each other and seek advice or support when the need arose.

The added value of the Learning Network Meetings has been the learning opportunity provided to SSGT through being involved in what have been quite wide ranging discussions about current issues at community level.

### 6.2.6. The challenges of evaluation

Developing an evaluation approach applicable to such a diverse range of projects using a variety of approaches targeted at participants of different ages was challenging. However, sharing initial proposals with grantees at an early stage and working jointly to develop tools enabled the development of an approach which worked well for the youth and women's sector projects and provided a straightforward measure of the difference being made to add to the reflections of project workers. These were not appropriate to the often sensitive work of the place-based dialogue projects, however, and while some alternative measures were developed and explored with the groups, ultimately these were either not used or not used consistently. For this reason, the evaluation relied heavily on the annual reports of both these projects and the reflections of the external assessor who knew the work of both groups well. This together with the work of the other projects, would perhaps have benefited from an approach which incorporated triangulation of information from a number of external sources to more adequately assess the impact and contribution of specific projects.

Overall, however, the evaluation process worked well for grantees and for SSGT. Project workers reported that engagement with the evaluation process had supported them in identifying and demonstrating how their work was making a difference. It had also helped them to reflect on their practice. The approach taken in SIPA was compared favourably with the evaluation requirements of other funders and was seen as a genuine process to support learning and reflective practice.

### 6.2.7. The value of building in resources to meet emerging needs

A small amount of funding was built into SIPA to enable it to meet any training or other needs which emerged as the projects rolled out. The availability of contingency funding proved useful and enabled SSGT to commission additional support for two grantees from the independent assessor and evaluator around compiling annual reports and evaluation.

Other than this SSGT initiated use of the fund, no further support was provided and no requests for technical support were made by grantees despite evidence from year 2 reports that in a number of cases, some grantees may have benefited from technical support to respond to challenges.

It was unclear to what extent grantees were aware that funding for technical support was available or how to access this. On reflection, greater clarity on the availability of specific funding for technical support and the process by which this could be requested would have been helpful. More regular contact between SSGT and grantees including site visits may have been helpful in identifying how additional support might have helped address challenges.

## SECTION 7

# conclusions

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The SIPA programme was intended as a pilot project from which it was hoped to identify learning about the contribution of community based initiatives to peacebuilding at this time and how this might best be supported by SSGT. Some high level conclusions on each are set out below.

## 7.1. The SIPA process

Generally the SIPA process has worked well from the perspective of grantees, SSGT and the Advisory Group. Elements which worked well and which could usefully be built into any future work seem to be to:

- **Make use of local knowledge and experience** –  
SIPA benefitted from a local Advisory Group particularly at the design stage and from the local knowledge of the assessor and evaluator.
- **Build in time for grantees to come together and reflect on their work** –  
the Learning Network meetings were valued by grantees. In the context of a competitive funding environment which mitigates against collaboration and shared learning they provided rare space and ‘permission’ for people to take time out and reflect on their work with their peers. These meetings also were a useful mechanism for SSGT to develop its understanding and knowledge.
- **Keep reporting proportionate** –  
SSGT’s approach to reporting was seen as straightforward and as comparing favourably to the practice of other grant programmes viewed as unwieldy and unjustifiably bureaucratic.
- **Take a flexible approach** –  
the flexibility shown by SSGT when projects needed to deviate slightly from or refocus plans in light of experience or in response to specific challenge was highly valued and contributed to the success of projects.
- **Make small grants** –  
even modest resources can make a contribution to peacebuilding at a local level.

There was also some learning and pointers on what aspects of the process might be improved. In particular:

- **The need for sufficient time for programme design and implementation –**  
SIPA was developed and rolled out under significant pressure of time which meant that some aspects were not able to be fully explored until much later in the process including how it might relate to the SCI Fellowship programme.
- **Identifying the support needs of grantees –**  
while funds for technical support were available to meet emerging needs, these were not drawn on by grantees though some may have benefited from this. Consideration could usefully be given to providing clearer guidance on the availability of funding for support and building in time for more regular contact between SSGT and grantees.
- **Clarity about multi-year funding –**  
consideration should be given to providing grantees greater clarity on the terms of multi-year funding and the specific requirements which need to be met to ensure funding in subsequent years.

## 7.2. The impact of SIPA

SIPA took place during a time of great uncertainty about the future due to a combination of factors not least the prospect of Brexit and a local political vacuum. This heightened existing community tensions both within and between communities. At the same time, there are also tensions within some communities in which BME people have settled. This is overlaid by a crisis in funding for public services which is impacting most sharply on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

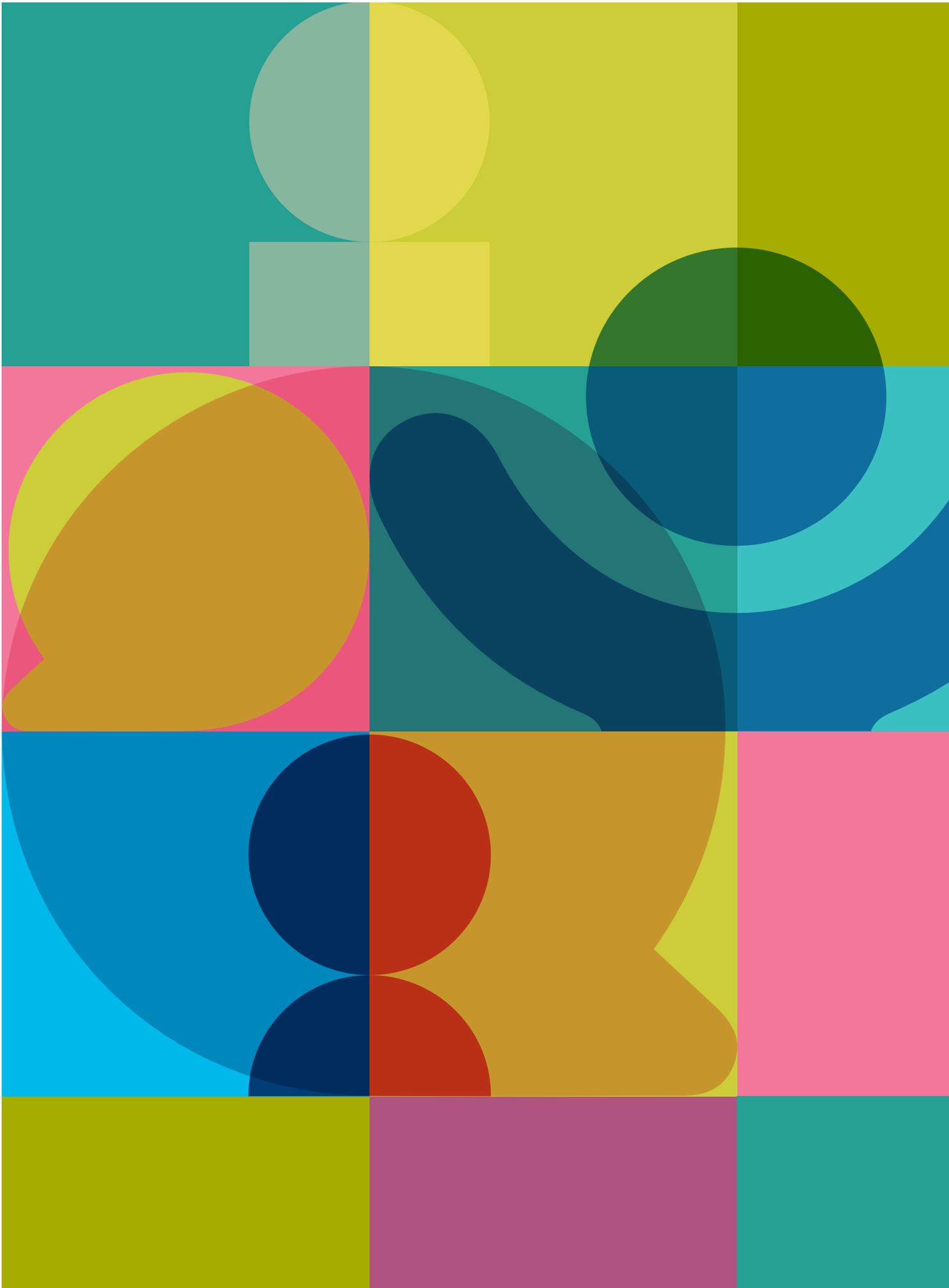
These factors have been a backdrop to SIPA and were managed well by the funded projects. The report has highlighted elements of peacebuilding practice that have worked well and which were used successfully to mitigate some of the challenges of peacebuilding at this time and which have supported bonding and bridging within and between communities. An important aspect of this has been to provide people with the space to explore issues of common concern that impact on everyone.

It is clear that the work supported has provided an opportunity, often for the first time, for people to work together and show leadership around shared issues with those from different cultural or religious backgrounds. The evaluation has illustrated how projects working with young people and women, have contributed to positive shifts in the extent to which people contribute to their own communities or across communities in terms of volunteering and activism. They have also contributed to individual confidence both in making change in their

own community and of working with people from different cultural or religious backgrounds to make a positive change for everyone. More significant changes in these areas were associated with projects which worked more intensely with participants or worked with people over a longer period of time.

The two geographically based projects focussed on supporting engagement and dialogue have contributed to the beginnings of new conversations and activism within and between communities among those who would not have engaged before. They have also contributed to better linking between communities and statutory agencies and elected representatives.

It is impossible to say what may emerge from the relationships built between those who took part in the SIPA projects albeit that most of those taking part felt that the friendships that they had made would continue. What has emerged is evidence of strengthened inter-community relationships between organisations involved in SIPA as project partners and through place-based work focused on supporting dialogue within and between communities. This work is contributing to new and strengthened informal structures being built across communities.



# appendices

## Appendix 1

### **Advisory group members**

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	SSGT
Orla O'Neill	SSGT
Adam Berry	Porticus

## Appendix 2

### Distance travelled rating scale

1. I spend time with or take part in groups or activities with people from a different religious or cultural background (please circle).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

2. I take part in activities or give my time to organisations (for example a school, charity, church, voluntary or community group) to help make life better for people in in my community (please circle).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

3. I take part in activities or give my time to organisations (for example a school, charity, church, voluntary or community group) to help make life better for people in in my community and for people in other communities from different religious or cultural backgrounds (please circle).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

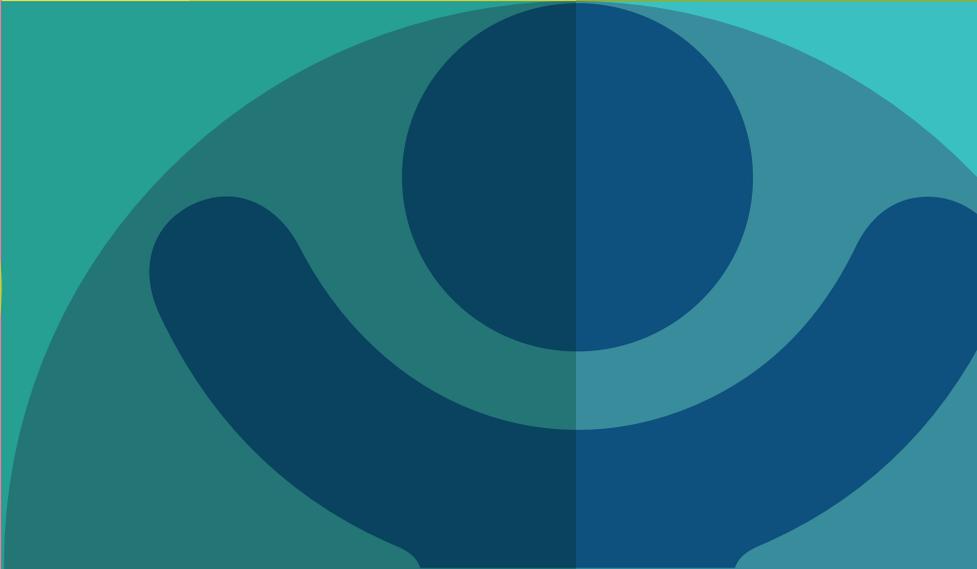
4. I feel confident about influencing or changing things I'm not happy with in my community (please circle).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

5. I feel confident about working with people from different religious or cultural backgrounds to work for positive change for everyone (please circle).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always



A stylized graphic of an eye, composed of various shades of blue and teal, positioned in the middle-right section of the page.

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