



Commission for Victims and Survivors and the Victims and Survivors Forum

Children and Young People Engagement Project

Research Report March 2016

Consultants



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1.0 Introduction

This report is the result of a small and time limited piece of research carried out on behalf of the Victims and Survivors Forum (hereafter the Forum) and the Commission for Victims and Survivors (hereafter CVS) between January and March 2016. The purpose of the study was to produce an independent report on behalf of the Victims and Survivors Forum informing how the Commission and Forum will engage the views and opinions of children and young people on conflict-related issues in the future. A key outcome of the work is to: “provide an informed approach to engaging the views of young people on legacy issues on a routine basis that in turn can augment the future advice of the Forum and the Commission”¹. This is in keeping with the Commission’s role as stated in OFMDFM’s *Strategy for Victims and Survivors 2009 – 2019*, which is to provide advice to government, who will then set policy. The Commission is also responsible for assessing need and ensuring the structures are in place to meet those needs. The Forum acts as an advisory body to the Commission. The Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) is the delivery vehicle providing resources and services². The researchers were also asked to consider the continued impact of conflict-legacy issues on the lives of young people and their families including: ongoing sectarian violence; paramilitarism (including paramilitary-style attacks on young people and young people becoming involved in paramilitary violence); conflict-related parental mental ill-health; segregation in education, housing and the impact of cross-community relations, and access to services to address the trans-generational impact of conflict-legacy issues in the future³.

1.2 Rationale for the research

The Forum and CVS wished to commission this work for a number of reasons:

The *Strategy for Victims and Survivors* recognises the impact of the Troubles / Conflict on Children and Young People, and under the heading of Building for the Future, states:

*“An important area to be addressed is likely to be the inter-generational impact of the troubles on children and young people and the need to promote cross-community work with children and young people. In this regard the Commissioner should establish links to the work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People”*⁴.

Because of this, CVS has commissioned substantial research aimed at identifying the impact of conflict-legacy issues on children and young people and examining levels of service provision. The Victims and Survivors Forum’s Building for the Future (BFF) Working Group has also produced Advice Papers on the matter of children and young people⁵. The cumulative outcome of these reports, alongside a number of academic and practitioner reports produced since the 1998 Agreement, is that there now exists a growing body of evidence highlighting a range of conflict-legacy issues faced by children and young people in Northern Ireland.

This research convinced CVS and the Forum that they need to engage more regularly and meaningfully with children and young people so that their voices could be heard in relation to conflict-legacy issues

¹ CVS Tender Specification, pp. 1-2

² OFMDFM 2009, pp. 6-7

³ Tender Specification, pp. 3-4

⁴ OFMDFM 2009, p. 12

⁵ BFF Advice Paper 2013 and BFF Advice Paper 2014

and building for the future. The Commissioner for Victims and Survivors has expressed her view on the importance of such engagement:

“I have talked to many individuals affected by the troubles who have sought to protect their families by not discussing issues concerning bereavement, loss and harm. The evidence increasingly shows that this is not the safe option; in a culture of silence young people then have to make their own story up and often also have to try to understand the impact that trauma has had on their parents without knowing about their experiences. This impacts on relationships and on young people.”

The question was then how best to go about this engagement. This research explores that question and makes recommendations so that CVS and the Forum can produce a plan for engaging with children and young people in the coming months and years.

1.3 Methodology

In order to carry out this research in a short timeframe, a range of approaches were used to gather information, as follows:

- Roundtable event held on 26 February 2016, attended by 24 stakeholders and using a mix of small group work with feedback and plenary discussion;
- Survey of 26 participants at the CVS Conference held on 9-10 March 2016;
- Meetings and conversations with the Victims and Survivors Forum;
- Interview with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Victims and Survivors using a semi-structured interview;
- Interview with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) using a semi-structured interview;
- Interviews with 14 stakeholders including representatives of victims and survivors groups, practitioners working with youth organisations, academics and other organisations likely to be able to contribute to the discussion;
- Regular engagement with CVS staff;
- Review of relevant documentation, in particular research and advice papers produced for or by CVS and the Forum.

As will be evident from the range of methodologies deployed, aside from the results of the Conference survey, the findings presented in this report are qualitative rather than quantitative. Our approach has been to reflect the full range of views expressed and from those, to signal the views and opinions which arose most frequently and which therefore could be described as “preferred options” for engagement. However, we also draw attention to views less frequently expressed but which signal a particular perspective and therefore merit inclusion in the report. Based on these findings, we draw conclusions and make recommendations for CVS and the Forum to consider so that they can build a work plan in order to progress their efforts to engage with children and young people.

We have kept feedback anonymised throughout the report, although where appropriate and with their consent, we have quoted both the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

1.4 Structure of Report

Following this introductory section, the remainder of the report is structured as follows:

Section 2: The case for engaging children and young people on conflict-legacy issues;

Section 3: The impact of conflict-legacy issues on the lives of children and young people;

Section 4: Issues to consider in planning engagement with children and young people;

Section 5: Ways for CVS and the Forum to routinely engage with children and young people;

Section 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.

Section 2: The case for engaging children and young people on conflict-legacy issues

There are a number of reasons for engaging the voices of children and young people on conflict-legacy issues, and these can broadly be divided into the following categories:

- Children and young people's rights;
- Policy commitments to children and young people in relation to conflict-legacy issues and peace;
- Benefits of engagement to young people, organisations and wider society; and
- The impact of conflict-legacy issues in the lives of children and young people – this is dealt with in Section 3.

2.1 Children and Young People's Rights

2.1.1 UNCRC

The most fundamental reason for engaging with children and young people on conflict-legacy issues is that they have a right to engage – a view strongly held by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, who states: "Children and young people have an absolute, non-negotiable right to have a say in a safe and appropriate way". Their rights in this regard are laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which was adopted in 1989. Article 12 of the Convention relates to the right of children and young people to have their voice heard and taken into account in matters affecting them:

"States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child".

Article 13 builds on this, and relates to freedom to share and receive information, as follows:

*"The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice"*⁶.

In 1991 the UK Government agreed to sign up to the Convention and to ensure that children knew about it. As a signatory the Government is obliged to respect all articles including Articles 12 and 13. The *Re:Action Consultation Toolkit on UNCRC* (2009) offers the following reading of the articles: "The UNCRC's emphasis of the right to participate moves beyond a limited shopping list vision of rights towards a more open and uncertain agenda in which children and young people can shape their future and make new demands of adult society"⁷. McAlister, Scraton and Haydon's 2009 *Childhood in Transition* report considered the position of children in post-conflict Northern Ireland and concluded that this right was not felt by the children and young people that they engaged with, for example: "In their families and communities young people often felt pre-judged by adults, without having the opportunity to have their views or accounts taken into consideration"⁸ and: "Many children and young people felt that they should have the right to have their views heard and taken seriously, but many felt that they were not encouraged to do so, nor were they involved in decision-making processes"⁹.

⁶ See <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

⁷ *Re:Action Consultation Toolkit*, p. 5, citing Roche, J. and Tucker, S. *Youth in Society – contemporary theory and practice*. Sage Publications in association with the Open University Press. 1997

⁸ McAlister et al, p.56

⁹ McAlister et al, p. 145

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors compliance with the Convention, has emphasized that this right should be: “anchored in the child’s daily life at home...and in his or her community... as well as in... [inter alia] the development of policies and services, including through research and consultations”¹⁰.

2.1.2 UNSCR 2250

Also of significance is the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2250 in 2015 by the United Nations Security Council which urges member states to increase representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in matters pertaining to youth, peace and security¹¹.

2.1.3 The Children’s Bill (2015)

At a Northern Ireland level, the Children’s Services Co-operation Bill introduced by Steven Agnew of the Green Party will: “require Northern Ireland departments to discharge their functions and co-operate with one another in order to contribute to the achievement of certain specified outcomes relating to the wellbeing of children and young people”. The Bill reached its final stage in the Assembly in November 2015. This means that there is now a duty requiring government departments to work together more closely in service provision and other areas, where the best interests of children and young people are served by doing so¹².

2.2 Policy commitments to children and young people in relation to conflict-legacy issues and peace

There are a number of policy commitments to engaging with and involving children and young people across a number of policy areas in relation to conflict-legacy issues and peace. These include:

2.2.1 Our children and young people – our pledge: a ten-year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016.

The ten-year *Strategy for Children and Young People* (now reaching its end) is based on a child-centred model, which is underpinned by a number of principles including: “Responding to the challenges of a society emerging from conflict” and “Developing a culture of involving children and young people in decisions that affect their lives”¹³. The Strategy contains the following pledges:

“In recognising that Northern Ireland is emerging from a prolonged period of conflict, we will ensure that our children and young people are supported to grow together in a shared, inclusive society where they respect diversity and difference”¹⁴ and; “In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we will be proactive in obtaining the views of children on matters of significance to them”¹⁵.

2.2.2 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

The establishment of the office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) in 2003, whose job is: “to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and

¹⁰ Emerson et al, p. 35, citing United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no.7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood. Geneva, 2005. UN/CRC/GC/7)

¹¹ See <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

¹² www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/current-non-executive-bill-proposals/childrens-services-co-operation-bill/

¹³ OFMDFM 2006, p. 8

¹⁴ OFMDFM 2006, p.17

¹⁵ OFMDFM 2006, p. 20

young people” signalled a commitment to formalising and enacting the commitment to safeguard and promote children’s rights¹⁶.

2.2.3 Strategy for Victims and Survivors

As stated earlier, under the heading of Building for the Future, the *Strategy for Victims and Survivors* states that:

“An important area to be addressed is likely to be the inter-generational impact of the troubles on children and young people and the need to promote cross-community work with children and young people. In this regard the Commissioner should establish links to the work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People”¹⁷.

2.2.4 Together: Building a United Community

The first stated priority of the *Together: Building a United Community* (TBUC) Strategy is: “Our children and young people”. It goes on to state:

“Everyone has a role to play and none more so than our children and young people who have often led the way in ground breaking community relations initiatives... We are ambitious in our vision – we want to build good relations amongst our children and young people and equip them for a future in which the cycle of sectarianism and intolerance is broken”¹⁸.

The document contains the shared aim: “to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations”¹⁹. It was considered by some contributors to this research to be unfortunate that the first mention of children and young people in the TBUC Strategy appears to be a negative one, implying that the attitudes of children and young people are a key problem – this will be dealt with later in the report. The commitments for children and young people included the creation of the United Youth programme offering 10,000 one year placements; the delivery of summer camps beginning with 100 in summer 2015; the creation of 10 Shared Educational Campuses, and the development of cross-community sporting activities.

2.2.5 Stormont House Agreement

The Stormont House Agreement²⁰ contains little relating directly to children and young people. However, it does commit to the provision of services including the establishment of a comprehensive Mental Trauma Service and access to high quality services²¹. It also proposes the establishment of an Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG)²² and an Oral History Archive²³. However, the Fresh Start Agreement does not cover these aspects of the Stormont House Agreement, and contains only a few thin references to children and young people within its 67 pages²⁴.

¹⁶ www.niccy.org

¹⁷ OFMDFM 2009, p. 12

¹⁸ OFMDFM 2013, p. 33

¹⁹ TBUC, p. 4

²⁰ NI Executive 2014

²¹ NI Executive 2014, p. 6

²² NI Executive 2014, p. 9

²³ NI Executive 2014, p. 5

²⁴ Northern Ireland Executive. *A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan: an agreement to consolidate the peace, secure stability, enable progress and offer hope*. November 2015.

2.3 Benefits of engaging children and young people

A further reason for engaging with children and young people, which appeared both in the research and in consultation with stakeholders, was that there were clear benefits in doing so, to children and young people themselves, and to organisations, communities and society more widely. However, a recurrent theme was that the benefits only accrued when engagement was done regularly and well (see Section 4).

NICCY outlines the benefit of engaging children and young people: “There are real benefits for all: active involvement of children and young people will mean a more effective and user friendly service and will also develop the skills and confidence of the young person and enhance the local community”²⁵.

Research carried out by Rodney Green (2000) examined the experiences of over 100 Northern Ireland based statutory and non-statutory organisations in engaging with children and young people. He notes: “Respondents cited examples of young people developing their self-confidence and self-esteem, gaining personal development opportunities and maturity, developing skills in programme planning, decision making and management and feelings of greater ownership / sense of belonging / motivation”. He adds that at its best: “Participation enables children and young people to engage as citizens within their communities and society and sends powerful messages about the value placed on the opinions and aspirations of the young”. Green also found that some statutory providers felt that their engagement helped them to focus services better, and about half of those surveyed considered that young people’s views had also had an effect on decision makers outside of the organisation²⁶.

This finding is echoed by McAlister et al who found that: “When children and young people were consulted and included in decision-making processes they felt respected, cared for and positive about themselves. Lack of consultation led to feelings of disrespect, exclusion, sadness and anger”²⁷.

At the Roundtable event, participants added other potential benefits to engaging well with children and young people. These included:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing;
- Improved resilience;
- Possible removal of barriers between generations if there is increased understanding between them about the past;
- Better targeting of services.

²⁵ See <http://www.niccy.org/media/1330/niccy-advice-benefits-of-engagement-with-children-and-young-people-dec-14.pdf>

²⁶ Green, 2000.

²⁷ McAlister et al, p. 56

Section 3: The impact of conflict-legacy issues on the lives of children and young people

Whilst rights, commitments and benefits in themselves provide ample reason for engaging the voices of children and young people, the reason most regularly raised in the research and from consultations with stakeholders is that almost two decades after the 1998 Agreement, children and young people continue to be impacted negatively by the legacy of the Conflict / Troubles in a number of ways.

3.1 NICCY *Your Voice Matters* engagement

As noted earlier, the *Victims and Survivors Strategy* suggests co-operation between the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and the Commissioner for Children and Young People. This research has found that there is a clear confluence between the focus and interests of the Children's Commissioner, and the focus and interests of the Building for the Future aspect of CVS's work.

At the end of June 2015, the Children's Commissioner launched her "Your Voice Matters...Because You Matter" programme which was aimed at engaging with young people across Northern Ireland. NICCY engaged with 31 groups and over 350 young people aged 8-21, including the NICCY's Youth Panel²⁸. A number of issues emerged through the "Your Voice Matters" programme, including Community Safety, which covered: "the influence of paramilitaries, to the impact of sectarianism in the education, play and leisure activities, social activities, mental health and employment"²⁹. NICCY found that these issues emerged repeatedly through the programme, the NICCY Youth Panel and at a Community Relations workshop held at the end of October 2015. This led NICCY to organise an event in December 2015 entitled: "Creating a place for children and young people in building a peaceful future". The aim of the event was to: "examine and create a forum to discuss the absence and exclusion of children and young people from discussions and decision making on building a peaceful and stable society in Northern Ireland"³⁰. This work will ultimately feed into the Committee on the Rights of the Child's examination of the UK government's compliance with UNCRC.

NICCY's engagement processes have led to a number of important findings, many of which are highly relevant to the Commission and Forum's desire to engage more routinely with children and young people. Some of the findings include:

- A sense that young people are excluded from discussions and decisions related to peace;
- A substantial degree of concern about paramilitary activities and intimidation and violence towards young people;
- Concern about policing;
- Lack of knowledge about the Conflict / Troubles and the need for more awareness raising to be built into the curriculum along with teacher training;
- A lack of awareness of the right of children and young people to get involved;
- Negative stereotyping of young people;
- The need for more integrated education;

²⁸ Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. *Your Voice Matters...Because You Matter*. DRAFT. 2015, p. 2

²⁹ Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. *Creating a Place for Children and Young People in Building a Peaceful Future: Feedback Report*. January 2015, p. 1

³⁰ Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. *Creating a Place for Children and Young People in Building a Peaceful Future: Feedback Report*. January 2015, p. 1

- Lack of faith in political leadership perceived to be stuck in the green/orange rut instead of attending to real issues affecting lives;
- Poverty and associated disadvantage³¹.

There is considerable alignment between NICCY’s findings and the findings of research commissioned by CVS and others, the work of the Building for the Future Working Group, and the findings of the consultation undertaken for this report. Some of these issues are experienced by the majority of children and young people every day, for example, the persistence of segregated housing and segregated education, and the often sectarian nature of political discourse by some political leaders in the media. Some issues, however, are experienced much more by some communities than by others, for example, paramilitarism and low educational attainment, and still other issues sit at the heart of the family, where trauma experienced by parents and grandparents impacts on attachment, parenting and resilience, a phenomenon which has been termed trans-generational trauma.

The remainder of this section summarises the issues raised in the research reviewed, in interviews with key stakeholders, and through the Roundtable event and the CVS Conference.

3.2 Trans-generational trauma and associated mental health issues for parents, children and young people

A number of pieces of work have led to trans-generational trauma becoming an increasing area of focus for the Building for the Future Working Group of the Forum for Victims and Survivors³².

CVS carried out a *Comprehensive Needs Assessment* in 2012, the aim of which was to inform government of the services required to: “improve the quality of life and create the conditions where victims and survivors can flourish in society”. The study devotes a chapter (Chapter 6) to trans-generational issues and young people. It draws on much of the research to date to acknowledge the issue of trans-generational impact, and it proposes that care pathways take account of this issue, and recommends increased inter-agency co-operation on trans-generational issues³³.

CVS then commissioned two research reports, one in 2012 with Queen’s University Belfast³⁴, and one in 2015 with Ulster University³⁵, which were aimed at building understanding about the trans-generational impact of the Conflict / Troubles on mental health and the continuing challenges for children and young people linked to ongoing conflict-legacy issues.

The findings of these two key reports echo and deepen understanding on issues that have been raised for many years, both relating to other areas emerging from conflict, and in Northern Ireland, not least the report by McAlister, Scraton and Haydon on *Childhood in Transition* (2009)³⁶ and research undertaken for organisations working directly with children and young people.

³¹ Summarised from Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. *Your Voice Matters...Because You Matter*. DRAFT. 2015; and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. *Creating a Place for Children and Young People in Building a Peaceful Future: Feedback Report*. January 2015

³² BFF 2013, p.10

³³ CVS CNA 2012

³⁴ Hanna, Donncha, Dempster, Martin, Kevin Dyer, Evanthia Lyons and Lee Devaney. *Young People’s Transgenerational Issues in Northern Ireland*. Queen’s University Belfast for the Commission for Victims and Survivors. April 2012.

³⁵ O’Neill, S, et al. *Towards a Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*. University of Ulster for Commission for Victims and Survivors. March 2015.

³⁶ McAlister, S., Scraton, P. and Deena Haydon. *Childhood in Transition: Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland*. Queen’s University Belfast. November 2009.

The report produced by Queen's University in 2012 explored whether there is sufficient evidence that transgenerational trauma exists as a valid phenomenon, how trauma could be transmitted from one generation to the next, and what the implications were for victims and families of victims of the Troubles in Northern Ireland³⁷. The report concluded: "Regardless of any strict classification that may be placed on transgenerational trauma, there does seem to be a growing body of evidence that trauma experienced by individuals can affect their children and grandchildren even when these generations have not experienced any of the initial traumatic experience themselves"³⁸. The report went on: "Research has also indicated that the co-occurrence of psychological disorders between traumatised parent and child is not due to their genetic link but to maladaptive parental behaviour as a consequence of the trauma"³⁹.

CVS then commissioned a team from Ulster University led by Professor Siobhan O'Neill which aimed to further deepen understanding of the mental health impact of conflict-legacy issues on children and young people with a focus on four key areas:

- the trans-generational impact of the Conflict / Troubles in terms of mental health;
- the relationship between the conflict-legacy and suicide;
- the effects on early years' development; and
- a review of service provision addressing the trans-generational impact on mental health and wellbeing, with a view to making recommendations for future service provision⁴⁰.

The report found that most people in Northern Ireland suffered no, or minimal, long term mental health disorders as a result of the Conflict / Troubles (around 71.5% of the population). However, it also concluded that: "the mental health difficulties of at least half of the remaining 28.5% appear to be directly related to the Troubles. Based on an adult population figure of **1.5 million**, this equates to around **213,000** adults"⁴¹. They go on to suggest that this has consequences for the children and grandchildren of those experiencing adverse mental health:

*"Specifically, the effects of violence, traumatic experiences and social segregation impact upon parenting practices which affect early attachment and the capacity of the child to self-regulate. Self-regulation difficulties increase the person's risk of mental disorders, behavioural problems and suicide. They also affect how that person engages with their own children when they become a parent. The accumulation of childhood toxic stress, resulting from negative parenting behaviours, exposure to violence and the use of harsh punishment, is associated with adverse mental health outcomes. Social deprivation and poverty serve to exacerbate the mental health impact of the consequences of the conflict"*⁴².

The report suggests that parental trauma-related psychopathology can impact on parenting, which in turn increases the likelihood of the child developing behavioural problems. It reveals that individuals exposed to violence tend to have a disproportionate rate of alcohol and drug use, and economic deprivation⁴³. Groups highlighted as being at particular risk are children of victims and survivors, ex-paramilitaries and police officers⁴⁴.

³⁷ Hanna et al, p. 6

³⁸ Hanna et al, p. 12

³⁹ Hanna et al, p. 14, citing Johnson et al, 2001

⁴⁰ O'Neill et al, p. 8

⁴¹ O'Neill et al, p. 8

⁴² O'Neill et al, pp. 8-9

⁴³ O'Neill et al, pp. 10-11

⁴⁴ O'Neill et al, p. 13

O'Neill et al also propose a cycle of trauma transmission and impact, and point to the risk not just to the individual and the family but also to the community and wider society, including: "new episodes of organised violence when for example there is a critical mass of people within the community who have unresolved loss and trauma related psychological difficulties"⁴⁵.

Whilst the earlier Queen's report does recognise that trans-generational impact: "is probably mediated by a number of other social and psychological factors"⁴⁶, the Ulster University report takes this further and details the issues which it considers deeply impact on the cycle of trans-generational trauma transmission:

- Wider economic and social post-conflict context
- Collective legacy of the Conflict / Troubles and ongoing paramilitarism
- Poor family and community support characterised by narratives promoting prejudice⁴⁷.

A report by WAVE Trauma Centre in 2014 recognises the impact of trans-generational trauma and insists that it cannot and must not be understood or treated in isolation from environmental factors: "It is the main contention of this Report that a family's experience of trauma is as much dependent on the social contexts they are living within such as responses by justice systems, the media, changing political contexts in Northern Ireland and others"⁴⁸.

Throughout the consultation for this research, there was wide acceptance of trans-generational trauma as a real and present threat to the mental health and wellbeing of certain groups of children and young people. There was concern for those drawn into anti-social behaviour, or criminal and paramilitary activity, but also for those who may retreat inwardly and may be less visible. As one contributor put it: "There's a lot of focus was being put on children and young people who have antisocial tendencies with no regard for the quiet withdrawn, silenced children who are equally affected by the past and legacies of the past". A number of contributors spoke of "self-blame" amongst young people with some feeling "guilt – feeling responsible for something they don't understand".

3.3 Suicide

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics indicate that since 2012 Northern Ireland has the highest rate of suicide in the UK⁴⁹. O'Neill states: "There has been a significant rise in the number of suicides in post-Agreement (1998) Northern Ireland. For example, in 2013, 303 suicides (and undetermined deaths) were registered in Northern Ireland compared to 144 a decade earlier"⁵⁰ While the report recognises that the connection is a complex one, and that more research is needed, it does suggest a relationship between deaths through suicide, and the legacy of the Conflict / Troubles, for example suggesting: "Major life experiences prior to suicide including relationship breakdowns, unemployment, financial difficulties and health diagnoses, may all be indirectly linked to conflict experiences; and that conflict-related mental ill-health and substance disorders increase the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviour"⁵¹.

⁴⁵ O'Neill et al, p. 9

⁴⁶ Hanna et al, pp. 71-72

⁴⁷ O'Neill et al, p. 10

⁴⁸ McNally, Damien. *Transgenerational Trauma and Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland*. WAVE Trauma Centre. March 2014, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Office for National Statistics (ONS). *Suicides in the United Kingdom: 2014 Registrations*. ONS, 2016

⁵⁰ O'Neill et al, p. 13, citing RGNI Report, 2013, p. 26

⁵¹ O'Neill et al, p. 13

For some contributors to this research, the suicide rates in certain communities were causing them considerable alarm, with some expressing great concern for young men who had become marginalised and disengaged even from their own communities. For some, there was a real danger for these young men in quite literally having “nowhere to go”. Others raised concern about “poor coping strategies” and “low levels of resilience” leading young people towards self-harm and suicide.

The BFF Working Group, having reviewed the research and having heard presentations from leading researchers including Professor Mike Tomlinson who has written extensively on suicide⁵² were sufficiently concerned about suicide rates to suggest that suicide awareness is made a required element of the curriculum⁵³.

3.4 Paramilitarism

Paramilitary activity was a recurrent theme across research papers, and throughout the consultation. There were particular concerns expressed throughout our consultation about young men in disadvantaged communities who had low levels of educational attainment, and few prospects, and who were vulnerable to paramilitary organisations in a number of ways:

- Being targeted by paramilitaries and asked to carry out tasks for them – which could include criminal activities;
- Borrowing money from paramilitaries and falling into a situation of “owing them” including drug debt, or getting into trouble with them for failure to repay debt;
- Becoming victims of paramilitary expulsions, beatings or shootings.

More than one contributor to our research felt that living under paramilitary control was part of some children and young people’s daily lives. One interviewee described a vicious circle in which young people were branded as: “antisocial, scum, thugs” which led to isolation and exclusion, and in some cases had led to suicide and paramilitary beatings. Concern was also expressed that: “not all members of the community are opposed to paramilitary style beatings” if they consider the young people to be trouble makers.

These findings bear out the evidence from academic research going back a number of years. The *Childhood in Transition* report found that: “Many children and young people were exposed to community violence, sectarian violence, rioting against the police, paramilitary style threats and punishments”⁵⁴ and that: “Violence impacted on children and young people’s feelings of safety, their freedom of movement, opportunities for play and levels of victimisation”⁵⁵.

Harland and McCready’s recent longitudinal study of young men born after the 1994 ceasefires found that:

“The legacy of the Troubles alongside a stubborn context of economic and social disadvantage in many working class communities is further confounded by very real threat to peacebuilding coming from paramilitary groups. This is particularly pertinent in working class areas that bore the brunt of political violence and where typically it was young men who were, and continue to be, the victims of paramilitary punishment attacks and shootings administered as ‘community justice’. In addition to the

⁵² E.g. Tomlinson, M. “War, peace and suicide: the case of Northern Ireland”. *International Sociology*. 2012

⁵³ BFF 2014, pp.13-14

⁵⁴ McAlister et al, p. 115

⁵⁵ McAlister et al, p. 116

*'rough justice' the young men in this longitudinal study, all of whom were born after the ceasefires, felt disconnected from local initiatives and believed they were regularly perceived as 'problems', as opposed to resources, by adults in their communities"*⁵⁶.

It is striking that the engagement undertaken by NICCY uncovered a considerable degree of concern about community safety issues including paramilitarism, and that it was raised repeatedly during conversations for this research, all of which suggests that it continues to be an enduring conflict-legacy issue impacting the lives of children and young people in certain communities, both rural and urban. Whilst young men are at the forefront of much research to date regarding paramilitarism and anti-social behaviour, there is also of course an impact on young women and girls in these communities.

Connected to sectarianism and community safety, there were also suggestions that there was a need for better engagement between the PSNI and children and young people in communities. It was suggested that there were still areas in which the PSNI were largely invisible, and that paramilitary activity was therefore able to flourish.

It is worth noting that in the Building for the Future Action Plan 2015-16, CVS is committed to working on addressing the legacy of paramilitarism by January 2017. This work would include: "Developing a strategy to work with key stakeholders, and work with NICCY and HRC, consider and monitor the new measures around paramilitarism as expressed in the Stormont House Agreement; work to reduce levels of paramilitary activity, and review current support services"⁵⁷.

3.5 Segregation

In Northern Ireland, segregation is part of life. Much of the population lives in communities which are predominantly made up of people perceived to be of one religious or community background.

In education, only 7% of children attend integrated schools (of which there are 63)⁵⁸ with most children (approximately 90%) educated in schools which are largely or exclusively segregated by religious tradition⁵⁹. A recent report by the Integrated Education Fund which engaged 2,000 young people aged 16-24 found that: "More than 80% of those questioned agreed that an education system bringing children of all faiths and none together in the same schools would be an important step in combatting sectarianism"⁶⁰. As the *Childhood in Transition* report puts it:

*"Every aspect of the lives of children and young people was defined by division – their identities, communities, schools, social networks, sporting activities and use of free-time. Notions of difference were perpetuated by a lack of inter-community contact and understanding. Segregated education and housing remained a significant barrier to ending sectarianism, often actively ensuring its continuation"*⁶¹.

For a number of contributors to our research, bringing young people together in school seemed like an obvious first step to breaking down barriers. While some expressed hope that Shared Education

⁵⁶ Harland, Ken, and McCready, Sam. *Rough Justice: Considerations on the role of violence, masculinity, and the alienation of young men in communities and peacebuilding processes in Northern Ireland*. UU, 2015, p. 13

⁵⁷ Commission for Victims and Survivors. *Building for the Future Action Plan 2015-2016 (and beyond)*

⁵⁸ See www.nicie.org

⁵⁹ IEF. *Young People's Voices*. September 2015, p. 7

⁶⁰ IEF, pp. 4 & 11

⁶¹ McAlister et al, p. 151

might lead to improved relations, others expressed the view that ultimately, there was a need to educate young people on a more integrated basis.

In 2014, the BFF Working Group produced an Advice Paper to the CVS on education, and made a number of recommendations including that legislation, policies and practices which maintain separate educational provision are kept under review; that arrangements for teacher education should be kept under review, with increased contact; and they propose that ultimately Northern Ireland should: “Move away from the current model of schooling based on religious denomination to a position where denominational schools are more of an exception rather than, as at present, the rule” and to develop resources to deal with these issues⁶².

Research too has pointed to the need to review the segregated education system: “Research has highlighted that parents have a major influence in relation to the transmission of prejudice within families...There is a need to examine further the role that attachment to community and sectarian identities play in the transmission of trans-generational trauma. It is therefore important to study the effects of political and policy decisions on dealing with the past and how this impacts on families across the generations. The role of segregated education in the transmission of prejudice should be examined and the effects of alternative education systems on the transmission of trans-generational trauma should be the subject of investigation”⁶³.

There was also a view that integrated education needs to be addressed. As one contributor said: “Shared education is a social experiment that hasn’t worked in other places. While you are educating kids separately, you can’t have a common curriculum – if there was one thing, integrated education would be it: you wouldn’t have to work quite so hard on the rest. This should be part of the curriculum in all schools”.

3.6 Sectarianism

Many contributors to our consultations also highlighted the ongoing issue of sectarianism. This was seen as particularly prevalent in areas which continue to experience conflict-legacy issues for example, interface areas, and areas experiencing culturally contested issues such as flags and parades. One young interviewee commented: “Sectarianism is every day, comments being made, we’re excluded from some areas, and stay out of others to stay safe”. There was also a view that sectarianism has evolved as the context has changed and might be more opportunistic that it had been in the past. One contributor cited examples of young people engaging harmoniously on a cross-community basis, but who, when the opportunity to riot or protest arose, would join simply because it was happening, rather than because of any sectarian affiliations or support for a particular cause.

The *Childhood in Transition* report found that sectarianism impacted considerably on children’s lives, finding that: “Children and young people from all the communities considered sectarianism to be an issue that affected their lives. Where they lived, their school, their uniform and sporting activities defined them within their cultural tradition”⁶⁴.

The report describes how children felt “badged”, exhibited a fear of being “identified as ‘the other’” and therefore limited in where they could go to for social and leisure activities. The research also

⁶² BFF 2014, pp. 13-14

⁶³ O’Neill et al, p. 21

⁶⁴ McAlister et al, p. 92

found that children from both communities: “shared negative views about foreign nationals”⁶⁵. O’Neill et al echo this finding, stating that: “The political and social divisions in Northern Ireland impact upon social integration and are associated with sectarianism and increasingly racism, homophobia and ‘hate crime’”⁶⁶.

There was a view expressed in consultations with stakeholders that the flag dispute had consolidated sectarian attitudes to “the other side” and heightened sectarian tensions between communities. In their report on the flag protests, Nolan et al recognise that: “Many children and teenagers in Northern Ireland have inherited a legacy of conflict that has negative influences upon their personal experiences and their socio-political views. Large scale studies of the attitudes of children and teenagers in Northern Ireland continue to show an awareness and wariness of community divisions, and evidence from other types of research with young people shows that this ‘inheritance’ has highly negative consequences for their personal experience and for their socio-political views”⁶⁷.

There was concern that some programmes to address sectarianism were too piecemeal and thin, when long-term engagement was in fact required. One contributor pointed to the need for long term engagement in order to address these issues, commenting: “If a child has had 14 years of sectarianism, taking them away for a weekend is not going to change it. And the one-off schools sessions are a nonsense”.

The BFF Working Group recognises the role of the TBUC Strategy in this regard, stating: “It will be important for the Commission and the Forum to keep under review the implementation of the key programmes and initiatives contained within the TBUC strategy and monitor how effectively it acknowledges and addresses the structural barriers perpetuating sectarianism and segregation in a society”⁶⁸.

3.7 Poverty and disadvantage

Many of those contributing to this research saw poverty and economic deprivation as deeply connected to conflict-legacy issues. More than one contributor noted that: “it’s no accident that the areas experiencing these problems are also the poorest”. The *Childhood in Transition* report describes this as the: “dual impact of poverty and the legacy of the conflict”, with poverty contributing to physical and mental ill-health, unemployment, poor educational attainment etc.⁶⁹. “Given that poverty remains pervasive in areas most affected by the conflict, children and young people living in these areas experience multiple deprivation. This affects their childhood opportunities, self-esteem and relationships”⁷⁰. As O’Neill et al put it: “Economic deprivation constitutes an additional stressor which in turn impacts negatively on mental and general health”⁷¹.

Contributors to our consultation from organisations working with marginalised young people pointed out that for many young people, unemployment was endemic in their families, with job opportunities “non-existent”, and with some living in homes where no family member had ever worked. This often led to debt and many commented on the lack of aspiration, leading to young people becoming “depressed and disheartened”, leading ultimately to “despair”. Domestic abuse and teenage

⁶⁵ McAlister et al, p. 105

⁶⁶ O’Neill et al, p. 11

⁶⁷ Nolan, P. et al. *The Flag Dispute: Anatomy of a Protest*. Queen’s University Belfast, December 2014, p. 89

⁶⁸ BFF 2014, p. 20

⁶⁹ McAlister et al, pp. 27-28

⁷⁰ McAlister et al, p. 28

⁷¹ O’Neill et al, p. 11

pregnancy were also raised as issues being faced by many young people. The connection between these problems, and a tendency towards drug and alcohol dependency (and associated issues with paramilitary groups) was drawn by a number of contributors.

Some contributors were keen to point out that these concerns applied as much to young people living in rural areas as to those in urban communities in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. There were references to young people living in isolated rural areas, who nonetheless still had issues with drugs and alcohol, as well as mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, due to lack of opportunities for social engagement.

3.8 Disengagement from the political process

Linked to the presence of paramilitaries, community unrest and sectarian tensions, it was suggested by a number of contributors that there was a pervasive sense of disengagement from the political process, indeed from the Peace Process, in some communities, again particularly evident among young men.

As one roundtable contributor noted: “Young people see politicians arguing about the past”, so that there was little example for them to follow in terms of how they deal with each other. There were a number of comments about the behaviour of politicians towards those from the “other side” and some dismay that this provided a poor model for young people to follow. There was concern that a focus on sectarian politics continued to hold back progress on social and economic issues. This is a point highlighted by the *Childhood in Transition* report, by the WAVE report and the Nolan report on the flags dispute. McAlister et al found that:

“Many community representatives and young people expressed frustration that the Peace Agreements had not brought significant change. They believed that the impact and legacy of the Conflict had been ignored, and that communities have been left without necessary economic and social support”; and “For working class young men with an unambiguous, strong cultural and community identity, there was a collective sense of loss – formal education was not valued, local work opportunities were declining with few alternatives, and their cultural identities were felt to be under-valued”⁷².

The Integrated Education Fund report found that “fewer than half of 16-24 year olds feel that politicians are moving Northern Ireland towards peace”⁷³

This disengagement, it was suggested, could lead some young men to find their identity and purpose through other channels, including rioting. One contributor spoke of: “misdirection and a lack of leadership” which for example had caused young men during the flag protests to have criminal records which, it was suggested: “should now be expunged, as young men are being led to jail by men who are not part of the future”. The report by Nolan et al on the flag protests points to the fact that active engagement in the protests provided young men with something that was otherwise difficult for them to find, given low qualifications and poor job prospects: a sense of identity and a role in society⁷⁴.

Masculinity and the conflict still remains an underemphasised issue in the Northern Ireland context. Hamber and Gallagher have outlined a number of its hidden impacts. To summarise this work, Hamber and Gallagher firstly have found that masculinity can be deeply entangled with violent conflict, creating an enduring legacy of violence not only in the political realm but also socially and at a

⁷² McAlister et al, p. 81

⁷³ IEF, p. 4

⁷⁴ Nolan et al, p. 89

community level, especially in contexts where ongoing socio-economic hardships persist. This can result in risk-taking behaviour and dissident paramilitary activity, as well as violence at a community or social level. Secondly, although paramilitaries can provide a hyper-masculine environment for asserting dominance and social control, young men participating in such activities and other anti-social activities might inwardly feel the opposite. This can result in violence being turned inward as evidenced by the growing rates of self-harm and suicide. Thirdly, masculinity can also be a factor in inhibiting help-seeking behaviour. Male gender roles can have a profound impact on how and whether young men access services, this in turn exacerbating cycles of violence, low self-esteem and self-harm⁷⁵.

In Hamber's paper to the CVS Conference in 2016, he comments:

“Until ‘Big Man’ politics at the wider level and even within communities, enacted with or without guns, is a thing of the past, how can we expect young people to behave differently? There is a disproportionate focus on young people’s attitudes in many policy documents in Northern Ireland, when it is the attitudes of adults, and politicians (not all of course), that should be scrutinized and modelled differently. That said, I am not sure if issues from the past move from one generation to the next in a predictable, inevitable, or generalizable way. What happens inter-generationally is dependent on what has gone before and the nature of the present. The memories and associated traumas of the past are not carbon-copied from one generation to the next, but rather take on a life of their own, manifesting in a myriad of ways. A transparent, public process of discussing the past will have a different outcome than social silence about human rights violations or where identity politics go unchallenged across the years”⁷⁶.

For McNally, the extent of young people's engagement or disengagement is bound up with: “whether the wider social context is one in which there is a political framework operating which gives voice or not to the disempowered”⁷⁷.

3.9 Access to Services

Previous research has considered the extent of service provision, particularly in the area of trans-generational trauma. Both the Queen's report and the Ulster University report found that only a small proportion of trauma services specifically recognised and named trans-generational trauma and provided services geared towards it, although some did provide programmes aimed at younger people⁷⁸.

NICCY notes the disproportionately low spend on children and young people's mental health services (8%) and indicates additional concerns about the most vulnerable children and young people⁷⁹.

The Queen's report concludes that despite a clearly evidenced need: “young people are not accessing the services which could aid them”⁸⁰. The Ulster University report found that a small number of service providers funded by the Victims and Survivors Service provide youth based services “explicitly focussed on trans-generational needs” but that services were not evenly distributed across Northern Ireland⁸¹. For this reason, the report recommends: “a strategic two-generation approach”, identifying

⁷⁵ See Hamber and Gallagher, 2014; Gallagher and Hamber, 2015; Gallagher, Hamber & Joy, 2012

⁷⁶ Hamber 2016, p. 5

⁷⁷ McNally, p. 67

⁷⁸ Hanna et al, p. 38, and O'Neill et al, p. 15

⁷⁹ see <http://www.niccy.org/about-us/our-current-work/>

⁸⁰ Hanna et al, p. 77

⁸¹ O'Neill et al, p. 15

the families who are most at risk⁸². As well as services aimed at individuals and families, the report proposes that: “Wider actions are needed to address the social, economic and environmental determinants of mental disorders”⁸³.

Emphasising the importance of these and other contextual factors including the political context and justice, the WAVE report urges against a purely medicalised definition of trans-generational trauma, suggesting that it should rather be seen as a phenomenon deeply connected to its social and political environment⁸⁴. This could have implications for service delivery and how it sits within and relates to community and societal contexts.

Some of those consulted expressed concern that there were simply not enough services to address the needs of the vulnerable young people with whom they were working. Others recognised the cultural barriers, particularly for young men in need of help. This was borne out by the findings of Harland and McCready’s longitudinal study of marginalised young men, which found that: “Despite the complexity of their lives, these young men did not seek or expect support from others. By not seeking support they believed they were demonstrating an important aspect of their masculinity – namely, that men do not need the support of others”⁸⁵.

A recurring theme in many contributions was the issue of funding. There was concern that because of the nature of trans-generational trauma, the short-term funding model within which many non-statutory services have to operate was inappropriate to the needs of those affected. There was concern that short term interventions, and discontinuance of service could in fact be damaging to vulnerable people.

3.10 Conference Survey findings

At the CVS Conference held in March 2016, participants at the Building a Better Future workshop were asked to indicate what they felt were the top three most pressing conflict legacy issues impacting on children and young people. Whilst the researchers recognised that many of the issues were deeply interrelated and that all were important, it was considered useful to get a sense of where people’s key concerns lay. From 26 forms completed at the Conference, parental mental ill health was felt to be the highest priority, with cross-community relations considered second highest priority. The third highest priority was paramilitarism. Access to services was considered fourth highest, along with sectarianism, with segregated education and parental physical ill health joint fifth. Segregated housing scored lowest in this exercise.

⁸² O’Neill et al, p. 16

⁸³ O’Neill et al, p. 19

⁸⁴ McNally, p. 76

⁸⁵ Harland and McCready, p. 14

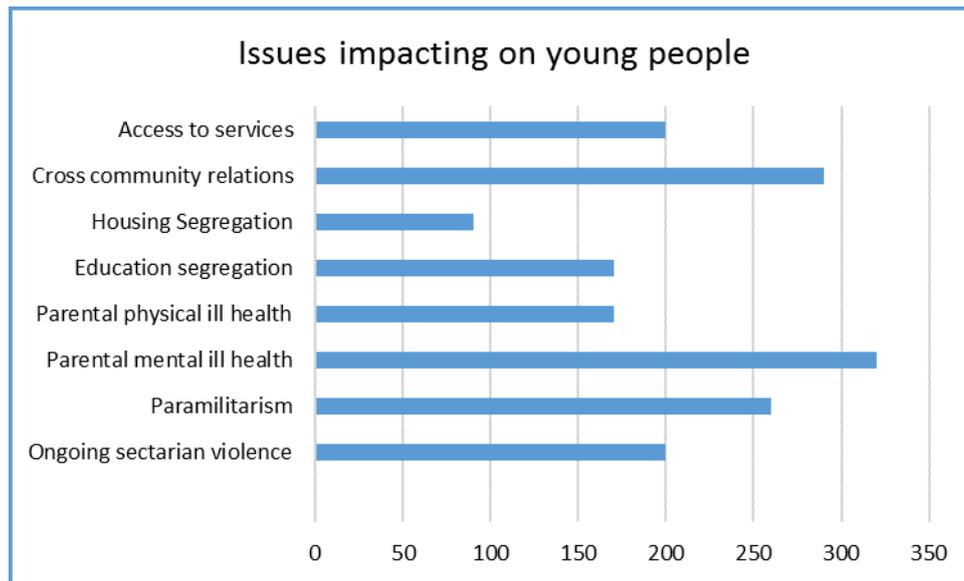


Figure 1: Issues impacting on young people

3.11 Conflict-legacy issues – or not?

There was discussion throughout many aspects of this research about the extent to which the various issues raised were in fact conflict-legacy issues or not. As one roundtable participant put it: “How do we differentiate between conflict-related issues and other children’s issues? Is there a danger of trying to make all young people into victims of the troubles?” Another suggested that the issues being experienced, for example in disadvantaged areas of Belfast, were comparable to the issues manifesting in other parts, particularly urban parts, of the UK and Ireland, and could not be attributed to the Conflict / Troubles. Some contributors felt that it was important not to attribute all social problems associated with young people to the legacy of the past. As one put it: “Kids on the same street don’t all behave the same way, so a child’s home environment and personality are also factors contributing to behaviour”.

One contributor pointed out that, regardless of how anyone else frames their problems: “Many young people may not see their current difficulties, whether within families or communities, as in any way connected with the Troubles”. As another put it: “It’s no longer in their language but they are still struggling with it, they are in families who experience symptoms of the conflict. We’re all victims but some of the young people are the most affected and the least understood and forgotten”.

This is an issue which Hanna et al picked up on in 2012, noting that: “Young people who are experiencing issues due to their family and community experiences of the troubles are often totally unaware that the problems they are experiencing are in any way related to ‘The Troubles’, their community, or their family experiences”⁸⁶.

While the problems pertain and need to be dealt with, whatever their cause, there was a strongly held view by some contributors that it was essential to: “name both the issues and the probable causes before sustainable solutions can be found. This naming has to be to the wider community and no

⁸⁶ Hanna et al, p. 51

longer either hidden or ignored”. Another concurred, suggesting that what was needed was: “a language for conflict-legacy issues – as what gets named gets addressed”.

It was considered important, however, to understand that: “some young people do not see why we are still talking about this”.

Section 4: Issues to consider in planning engagement with children and young people

4.1 Which children and young people?

While there was considerable alignment between contributors that children and young people across Northern Ireland were all impacted to some degree by the Conflict / Troubles, there was also broad agreement that there were differing degrees of impact. It was recognised that some young people were having a lived experience of conflict-legacy issues every day within their own families, streets and communities, while others were experiencing issues such as segregated education and housing, which, while impacting on them in terms of estrangement from other communities, did not exert the immediate damage and trauma that those experiencing trans-generational trauma, paramilitarism etc. were confronted with.

It was suggested during the consultations that given the likely constraints on CVS in terms of time and budget, it would be helpful for them to distinguish between different (broad) groupings of young people and to ask the question: “Which children and young people do we need to engage with most urgently”?

4.1.1 Degrees of impact

It is important to note that although there was agreement that those children and young people impacted most should be the top priority for CVS and the Forum, and while broad categories were suggested by some contributors, there was of course acknowledgement that the categories were deeply connected and that there would no doubt be overlap. Four broad categories of children and young people were suggested as follows:

1. Those impacted by trans-generational trauma or suffering trans-generational impact of some kind within families. These might be:

- children of victims and survivors;
- children of families directly or indirectly traumatised by the Conflict / Troubles;
- children of former prisoners;
- children of serving police officers and security personnel who, it was suggested: “are living with fear and the threat of violence and the need to be silent about parents’ professions here and now”.

When asked which communities CVS and the Forum should focus on, one contributor suggested: “One way to start would be to look at the suicide map of Northern Ireland – it would show you where the focus needs to be”.

2. Those experiencing conflict-legacy issues in their communities for example through paramilitary violence and intimidation – although other community issues were raised such as poverty, addiction, educational under-attainment etc. and were seen as closely interlinked with more direct conflict-legacy issues.

3. Children and young people in wider society, beyond the most directly affected communities, but who still experience the legacy of the Conflict / Troubles in housing and educational segregation, dysfunctional political discourse, conflicted identity politics around cultural events and symbols etc.

4. Children and young people with additional needs such as those from different ethnic groups, LGBT children and young people, those who are within the criminal justice system, those who are in care, and those with disabilities. Green emphasises the importance of remembering diversity in children and not seeing young people as one indistinguishable group: “True participation must also take

account of the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of the children and young people involved. This means that children and young people cannot be viewed as one homogenous group. Differences will arise as a result of personal experience, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and disability” (Green 2000).

4.1.2 Age

Children are legally defined as any person up to the age of 18. Organisations working with young people tend to have different definitions of what constitutes a young person depending on the programmes they run. NICCY works with anyone up to the age of 18, or 21, for young people who have a disability or have been or are in care. The Northern Ireland Youth Forum⁸⁷ engages with young people up to the age of 11-25 years, and the NEET Youth Forum⁸⁸ (for young people not in education, employment or training) engages with young people aged 16 to 25 years.

However, contributors to this consultation were less concerned with the upper age limit with whom CVS and the Forum should engage than they were with the distinction between children and young people and what this meant in terms of how CVS and the Forum should engage with them. Many felt that there was an age, around mid-teens, when young people were more able to engage in difficult issues. As one contributor put it: “Less than 14 years old, this work would be hard”.

i) Early Years

When contributors talked about engagement with children in their early years, they tended to focus on the importance of family interactions and the need for support to be provided to families and within communities to engage in a healthy and appropriate way with young children about conflict-related issues. As one contributor put it: “The way you talk to little ones is different – the stuff they give is priceless and the insight is great”.

There was considerable discussion about the need for support for families to work on communicating with children, even at a very young age. Some contributors spoke of the need for guidance on communicating difficult issues to young children. One researcher felt that any kind of centralised guide would be very difficult to produce in the current circumstances, but could envisage communities being supported to put together their local storybooks guided by experts in developmental psychology so that materials are age appropriate. Working Group members also highlighted the need for advice on communicating within families about trauma and loss⁸⁹. They recommend: “the development of practical guidance for victims and survivors to assist them in managing their conversation about the traumatic impact of the conflict with young members of their immediate family”⁹⁰.

O’Neill et al concur, concluding that: “Research into ways of supporting families in communicating about the Troubles to future generations is required. In particular, we need to examine ways of communicating about conflict-related bereavement, mental illness and physical injury”⁹¹ (O’Neill et al, p. 21).

⁸⁷ www.niyf.org

⁸⁸ www.neetforumni.org

⁸⁹ BFF 2013, p. 7

⁹⁰ BFF 2013, p. 11

⁹¹ O’Neill et al, p. 21

ii) School age children

In terms of engaging school age children, there were different views on whether or not CVS and the Forum should seek to engage the voices of children and young people through school. This is dealt with in Section 5.

4.2 Willingness of children and young people to engage – and barriers

A number of contributors who regularly work with young people in particular suggested that the young people they work with were “ready and willing” to engage around these issues. NICCY’s engagement with children and young people found that young people wanted to have a voice and a say in matters relating to the legacy of the Conflict / Troubles and to peace. This is despite the fact that much of the research identifies a “culture of silence” as a key barrier to dealing with trans-generational issues⁹². It may be that this kind of silence is particularly pertinent to dealing with issues within families, and has a more specific relationship to trans-generational trauma as opposed to wider social and community issues, or it may be that communication is easier when amongst peers or when facilitated by a trusted youth worker.

That said, a number of contributors spoke of the potential barriers and challenges which they felt that CVS and the Forum should be aware of when engaging with children and young people, however ready they may appear to be. These included:

- Reluctance on the part of adults to share information about the past with children and young people, either because they do not know how to do this in a healthy way, or because they do not wish to place “our baggage” on the next generation. As one contributor put it: “There is among adults a fear of opening old wounds, of dragging our young people backwards”. One respondent felt that it was: “because of adults’ reticence that children and young people are not already much more engaged, despite being ready and willing to engage already”.
- Lack of certainty over where to deal with issues – in the family, in school? One contributor asked: “whose role is it?”
- Lack of information given to young people in any co-ordinated way about the Conflict / Troubles.
- Lack of certainty over the distinction between children and young people, and how to engage in an age appropriate manner.
- Another suggested that there was: “insufficient joined up thinking between government departments which means that there is no clear strategy for engaging with children and young people on these issues”.
- Lack of trust and relationship with those consulting / engaging with young people.
- Consultation fatigue: One contributor raised a concern which was voiced by others, and considered to present a real potential blockage to certain groups of young people getting involved: “Many consultations have taken place and many groups and organisations have taken part in consultations previously and have never seen any work being done as a consequence or a result of the consultation. There is a resignation that the political will has not been there to get things done”. The Eames Bradley report was cited as an example. Linked to this was a lack of clarity about what engagement was actually hoping to achieve.

⁹² e.g. Hanna et al, p. 10, BFF 2013, pp.5-6, McNally, pp. 22 & 25

- A further possible barrier is the way that engagement is framed: as a positive contribution to the future, or as a necessary task, because young people are associated with problems. It was notable that one conference participant described a workshop question focusing on “the unique contribution of victims and survivors” as: “brilliant – this question changes the dynamic”. It may be that a discourse of trauma, problems and intractable social issues could drain the energy from participation, and that a different dynamic is needed.

However, despite the barriers and challenges, only a very small minority of contributors felt that children and young people should not be engaged around conflict-legacy issues. As one put it: “We have to deal with this as children will pick it up anyway. You create anxiety by not talking about it, they feel not included, that it’s their fault. Not talking about it just isn’t an option. It’s about working out appropriate ways of communicating about it”. Another said: “We’ve never found that talking is bad – it’s always good to talk”, and suggested that talking was strongly connected to resilience.

In the Ulster University research, the literature review of resilience concluded that “building and maintaining resilience at individual and community level is an important but complex area of work and needs much more attention in the context of post-conflict Northern Ireland”. As an example, the review noted the recently published Belfast Strategic Partnership Emotional Resilience Strategy, which recognises the psychological and wider trans-generational impact of the Troubles on the city⁹³.

4.3 What are the outcomes?

A question that was raised by a number of contributors to this research was: “What is the purpose of engagement?” In many good practice guides to working with children and young people, a theme that is repeated is the importance of being clear with them about what the purpose of the engagement is, and what outcomes it is aimed at achieving (good practice guidelines will be considered later in this report). One contributor remarked: “It is very important for the Commission to be clear what the desired outcome of engagement is and how they will measure it. If you can’t leave the young people in a better position, don’t go in. This exercise should only be embarked on if it is adequately resourced for long term development. If it’s a six-month exercise, or an academic exercise, I’d be concerned”.

One interviewee asked whether the purpose of CVS and the Forum’s engagement was to raise awareness of victims’ issues to children and young people, or to support and help children and young people to deal with legacies of the past. These are quite different outcomes to aim for, with different implications for what is offered to young people.

The tender specification for this research envisages the desired outcomes of engagement work as follows:

“Engaging the views and learning from the experiences of young people exposed to conflict-legacy issues will encourage participation among young people from different social, political and religious backgrounds, enhance awareness among Forum members and collectively address current limitations within existing service provision. Effectively capturing the lived experiences of young people and their families affected by the trans-generational impact of the Troubles can through the work of the Commission and the Forum strengthen calls for effective cross-departmental co-operation and political leadership in addressing enduring legacy issues”⁹⁴.

⁹³ O’Neill et al, p. 15

⁹⁴ Tender Specification, p. 2

The BFF Work Plan for 2015-16 states the possible benefits, some of which might also be construed as outcomes:

- “Facilitate meaningful engagement with young people relating to the trans-generational impact of the Troubles – where previous engagement has been relatively limited
- Deepen understanding of need for ‘two-generation’ approach in addressing trans-generational impact on parents, young people and the communities they live
- Understanding both needs of specific generations and how relationship between generations are negatively affected by conflict-related experience
- Develop better informed advice that can collectively address current limitations within existing service provision and the strategic approach to building a better future”⁹⁵.

However, some conversations held during this consultation suggested that there are two issues in this regard for CVS and the Forum to bear in mind:

- i) There is a lack of clarity as to the precise outcomes of CVS and the Forum’s engagement with children and young people. Some see it as a way to gather the views and lived experiences of children and young people in order to inform the Forum and CVS so that its advice to government is attuned to the needs of children and young people particularly with regard to service provision. Others see it as a way to find out what young people need to happen to improve their situations, and to then intervene in certain issues in order to improve the lives of children and young people – in other words that there would be a follow-up “offer” to children and young people or their communities to address the issues they have raised.
- ii) There is a concern for some contributors, particularly those who work directly with children and young people in disadvantaged communities, that if the purpose is only to gather views and experiences, that it may raise expectations among those young people that they will see some direct action or intervention as a consequence, when in fact this may not be the case.

4.4 Levels of Participation

Contributors to this research, particularly the young people who contributed and those who work with young people, felt that it was of critical importance, particularly if engagement was to be “routine” as CVS states, that young people have a clear sense at the outset of which level of participation is being asked for or offered. The issue was bound up for some with the question of “power”: what power the input of children and young people would have to change anything – and the extent to which they might or might not discern that change in their own lives. As with the question of outcomes, the key factor here was felt to be clarity.

The *Re:Action Consultation Toolkit* describes degrees of participation from manipulation and tokenism through to full engagement in initiation of shared decisions⁹⁶.

The Interaction Institute for Social Change proposes a model for levels of participation which it suggests is an important consideration before engagement with any group takes place. They suggest

⁹⁵ BFF Action Plan 2015-16

⁹⁶ Re:Action, p. 13

that it is important for groups to be clear about the extent to which they are being consulted, and the extent to which their input will inform decisions. Their model is entitled “Maximum Appropriate Involvement”, with an emphasis on the word “appropriate”. The levels of involvement they describe range from, at the bottom end: “decide and announce”, whereby leaders simply use engagement as a means of relaying information about decisions already made, through to “consensus” whereby decisions are made with leaders and stakeholders taking decisions on the basis of agreement (co-design could fit here) and through to delegation with constraints, whereby stakeholders make decisions taking into account factors and limitations such as budget etc.⁹⁷

Rodney’s Green’s report points to various possible levels of participation of young people as follows:

- Consulted and informed (project designed and run by adults, but children and young people are consulted, have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously).
- Assigned and informed (adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The children understand the project, they know who decided to involve them, and why. Adults respect young people’s views).
- Adult initiated, shared decisions with children and young people (adults have the initial idea, but young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but children are also involved in taking the decisions).
- Child initiated and directed (young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge).
- Child initiated, shared decisions with adults (children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct, but offer their expertise for young people to consider)⁹⁸.

Green’s report contains many examples of good practice in Northern Ireland across these levels of participation. In particular, Green states that: “Evidence presented within this report indicated that the community, voluntary and youth sectors have generally been the most innovative and consistent in their attempts to include children and young people in decision making”⁹⁹.

Current examples include the development of the NEET Youth Forum, which is run by and for young people not in education, employment or training, with the support of adult workers¹⁰⁰. As regards co-design, the Department for Employment and Learning’s United Youth Programme embarked on a substantial co-design process engaging young people across Northern Ireland¹⁰¹.

4.5 Principles for participation

The young people who contributed to the consultation and the organisations who support them had a lot to say about the basic principles of engagement with young people. These included:

Co-design: this is the idea of agencies and service providers working together with children and young people to build programmes together, as indicated above. Young people interviewed as well as personnel from organisations with a track record of working with children and young people suggested: “Get young people involved at the creation stage of any engagement – co-design”. This

⁹⁷ From the Facilitative Leadership Course, see www.interaction.org

⁹⁸ Green 2000, citing Treseder, 1997

⁹⁹ Green 2000

¹⁰⁰ www.neetforumni.org

¹⁰¹ www.delni.gov.uk/articles/united-youth

was echoed by other contributors particularly by those working with children and young people. CVS has already committed to co-design in aspects of service provision, so this approach blends well with the approach CVS aspires to. Another contributor suggested that young people should be encouraged to act as champions and leaders of engagement, considering that young people would be more likely to engage when encouraged and supported by peers.

Information and feedback: Young people interviewed felt that it was essential to let them know: “the value of their opinion and what it can influence” and to communicate to them the outcome of any consultation.

Relationships and trust: Many shared the view that: “relationships and safety need to be built in order to engage in some of the topics”. Many felt that this could only be achieved through working with and through organisations who are already working with young people on the ground, and who had already built relationships and trust, and safe practices utilised in order to engage on sensitive topics. This would be particularly important if routine engagement is sought. As one contributor put it: “do not make a smash and grab”, in other words, do not rush in, plunder young people’s input and leave.

Safe places: Some contributors emphasised the need for engagement on sensitive issues to take place in a safe place. One contributor felt that for young people in some communities, there were no safe spaces, and that they would be unlikely to engage unless the conversations could take place in an anonymised setting. While this was not a widely held view, for this contributor and the young men supported through their work, this was seen as necessary for engagement with CVS and the Forum, but also for any engagement or support to be provided to the most vulnerable young people. Connected to this was the necessity to attend to any ethical or confidentiality issues, and the need for clear boundaries and groundrules for engagement.

Support for children and young people: A number of contributors felt that it was important to support young people and build their capacity to engage. As one interviewee put it: “Remember some young people need support to engage, possibly through youth forums”. Another said: “Some young people need assistance to process information. Different learning styles, abilities and difficulties need to be considered”. One interviewee suggested: “Young people need someone to help them formalise their views and opinions, and build their knowledge and awareness, sensitivity and ensure their safety and then introduce them to other communities. So much groundwork needs to be done before they engage”.

Support for adults: A view was also expressed that adults needed as much support to engage as children and young people. As one young person put it: “It’s about learning you – learning us – it’s not just about young people building capacity – it’s also adults building capacity to engage properly with young people”.

In addition to these, Green’s research led him to identify these further principles and prerequisites including:

- Honesty about agendas and limitations;
- Voluntary involvement of young people in the process;
- Challenging of ineffective structures and approaches that block participative methodology and practice¹⁰²;
- Organisational change (e.g. consideration of language used, timings of meetings etc.);

¹⁰² Green 2000, citing the Northern Ireland Youth Service *Policy Review Consultation Report*, 1998

- Managing the process well (careful planning and support with clear structures, intentions, information, outcomes, groundrules / boundaries);
- Resources (the recognition that involving children and young people takes time, professional staff support, finance, and good quality training / support to enable the children, young people and adults concerned to engage appropriately and well);
- Include the excluded¹⁰³.

4.6 Approaches and methodologies

There is a wealth of information available online and from local youth organisations on ways to approach and work with young people, based on years of good practice. Many contributors recommended using tried and tested youth work approaches to engage children and young people, delivered by skilled staff, and harnessing peer support where appropriate. This could include interactive, participative and creative ways to engage.

One contributor recommended using the expertise and knowledge of peers to inform methods of consultation and engagement: for example, CYPAR (Children and Young People as Researchers)¹⁰⁴ was mentioned in this regard as an organisation who could advise on the best ways to gather input from children and young people. The *Prison to Peace* study included a group of young people in a Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG), who "worked as co-researchers with the adult research team throughout the project"¹⁰⁵.

Some gave examples of methodologies they had used, or seen used. A recurrent theme of these conversations was the importance of genuinely participative and interactive methodologies which allowed young people to have the appropriate level of input. There was support for the use of creative methods to enable young people to give their input in the way most comfortable for them.

The importance of taking a lead from young people, and listening to them, was emphasised. One contributor remarked: "You can't just tell young people things; you have to engage them". She gave an example of a recent interactive theatre piece on suicide which required young people to act out interventions that may have helped the situation. They were then supported afterwards to debrief the piece and counselling was available for those who required it.

Another example was given of an event bringing together young people from different communities and schools with the PSNI and MLAs at the Crumlin Road Gaol, where, through workshops and discussion young people were able to talk about their experiences of the PSNI.

Another contributor found that the young people they worked with became most engaged when they were responsible for planning and organising events and when their input and views were mainstreamed into adult events as opposed to being kept separate.

The Green report sought information from the organisations they consulted on methods of involvement and found that most organisations used direct contact with around half using activity based sessions or discussion groups¹⁰⁶. This allowed for small group discussion and activity, as well as plenary work in larger groups.

¹⁰³ Green 2000

¹⁰⁴ www.ncb.org.uk/who-are-we/northern-ireland/cypar

¹⁰⁵ Emerson et al, p. 5

¹⁰⁶ Green, 2000

While there was general recognition that children and young people carried out a substantial proportion of their interactions online and on social media, there was concern expressed that such forums can too readily be used for negative discourse. If social media was to be used, it was suggested that it would need to be closely managed and only used in relation to clearly defined questions and parameters.

Online resources contain a range of methodologies as well as guidance on how to use them, including for example, picture voting, graffiti walls, *Big Brother* style diary rooms, and online surveys¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁷ See Sheffkids: *Giving Children of Sheffield a Voice* (undated); also *Re:Action Consultation Toolkit*. November 2009. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/consultation-toolkit>

Section 5: Ways for CVS and the Forum to routinely engage with children and young people

Many suggestions were made at the roundtable, in interviews and at the Conference, for ways in which CVS and the Forum should engage with children and young people. Throughout the conversations, contributors also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches. The key findings are outlined below.

5.1 Collaboration with NICCY

As indicated earlier, the *Strategy for Victims and Survivors* proposes collaboration between the Commission for Victims and Survivors and NICCY in engaging children and young people on conflict-legacy issues. As has been shown, many of the issues which form a central concern for CVS have also emerged in NICCY's consultations with children and young people. NICCY is accustomed to engaging children and young people, including those hardest to reach, and has developed and promotes participation principles and methodologies to ensure "participation screening" of its own work, and promotes these principles across all Government Departments through its "Participation Policy Statement of Intent" (PPSI)¹⁰⁸. The Children's Commissioner has indicated that NICCY is willing to work with CVS to ensure that engagement is co-ordinated and collaborative, and appropriately targeted, recognising that it was essential to identify and work through organisations and workers on the ground who had built trust and relationships with young people.

Many contributors concurred that it made sense for CVS to collaborate with NICCY on this work, with a small number suggested that all engagement should be done through NICCY stating: "It needs to go through the Children's Commissioner". Another wondered whether the work should in fact be led by NICCY rather than CVS, expressing concern that: "CVS can't be all things to all people and needs to prioritise – while work with children and young people fits with the Building for the Future aspect of CVS's work, there are other agencies better placed – don't take the lead".

5.2 Local area-based engagement through existing organisations

In keeping with the view of the Children's Commissioner, the majority of contributors felt that CVS and the Forum should engage with children and young people by working with and through existing organisations and groups, in local areas and at interfaces. The Conference Survey found support for working with existing children's and young people's organisations: it scored 15 points out of 26. Linked to this was a widely shared recognition that professionals who are accustomed to working with children and young people have built up expertise which should be drawn upon.

A number of different pathways for this to happen were suggested, and these pathways link to some degree to the different groupings of younger people outlined in Section 4:

- i) Work through existing groups who are providing services funded by VSS. It was suggested that, as some of these groups are already providing services to children and young people, dealing for example with trans-generational trauma, they could provide a route to engage with these young people. That said, it was also noted that many groups were not directly dealing with children and young people, and it could be difficult for them to begin this sort

¹⁰⁸ NICCY Corporate Plan, p. 7

of engagement. The view was: “Start with the ones that do work with children and young people already”. It was also suggested that engagement could be carried out with the various victims and survivors groups across Northern Ireland, although the same issue was raised as to the extent to which they would be able to begin engagement with children and young people without a change of focus, expanding their work, and therefore requiring further resources.

- ii) Work with established youth organisations who have a track record of engaging marginalised young people in local communities. The idea was that this would be very much about meeting young people where they are at, in their local area, and enabling them to set the agenda about what to discuss and how to go about it, based on their particular issues, hopes and needs, and that this was likely to centre on community issues such as paramilitarism, drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy and suicide.
- iii) Aligned to this suggestion was the idea that CVS and the Forum should engage children and young people through locally based community groups and organisations. It was suggested that some of these groups may be directly connected with youth organisations active in the area, and some may not, and that some may be actively and positively engaging with children and young people, and others may not. It was suggested that it would be important to establish which groups to work with and through.

While there was considerable support for this approach, a number of contributors also pointed out that routine, meaningful engagement had resource implications, and there were concerns that many of the organisations with whom CVS and the Forum might wish to collaborate with in order to plan and facilitate engagement with young people, were often at the mercy of short term funding and highly restricted budgets. As McAlister et al put it: “Short-term, insecure funding had many negative implications for organisations aiming to develop services in communities”¹⁰⁹.

One contributor wondered if CVS could first run a pilot programme with some VSS funded groups and some other youth groups, noting that: “There could be excellent opportunities to develop something through Peace IV”. Others suggested the idea of trying out approaches and evaluating them: “to see what works and what doesn’t” rather than embarking on costly large scale programmes at the outset.

This approach of working with already established organisations fits with the BFF Working Group’s advice that: “Further work could be conducted with individuals and agencies working within the non-formal education sector e.g. youth-based organisations working with children and young people. This would improve awareness of the types of initiatives currently employed by this sector in addressing how legacy issues are still affecting the lives of young people today”¹¹⁰.

Throughout the consultation, a number of possible organisations which CVS and the Forum could connect with were suggested. These included:

- Youth Action
- Start360
- Youth Net
- Northern Ireland Alternatives
- Community Restorative Justice Initiative
- VOYPIC
- Falls Community Council

¹⁰⁹ McAlister et al, p. 135

¹¹⁰ BFF 2014, p. 21

- Coiste
- Children’s Law Centre
- The Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Young people’s services based in Hydebank and Beechcroft.

Whilst there was considerable support for engaging at a local community level, in Hamber’s paper to the CVS Conference he observed: “It is very important to look at how this work fits with the Implementation and Reconciliation Group envisaged in the Stormont House Agreement, and with the Oral History Archive etc. Will people in certain communities be constantly revisited for their stories, opinions, aspirations etc.?”¹¹¹

5.3 Network of existing Forums

It was recognised by many contributors that there were a number of youth forums and panels across Northern Ireland, including the NICCY Youth Panel¹¹², the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, the NEET Strategy Forum and others.

When contributors were asked whether CVS and the Forum should form a network of existing panels and forums, there was limited support for this approach, with many suggesting that in general, Northern Ireland wide panels tended to attract young people who were not from disadvantaged areas, and who tended to have high achievement levels, high confidence levels, and were less likely to be those affected by conflict-legacy issues. As one contributor put it: “Youth Panels can be very professionalised and not necessarily the voices you want to get”. Another commented: “To get the voices you want, you won’t get them flocking to a Forum, although there is a possibility that families of victims and survivors might engage”. There was therefore limited support for CVS and the Forum to develop any kind of formal network of existing young people’s forums and panels across Northern Ireland and to engage with them on a regular basis. This option received least support in the Conference Survey.

5.4 Engagement on the basis of themes

However, some contributors saw a role for CVS and the Forum to at times run events or conferences which could bring together young people across Northern Ireland, and that this could include young people from other forums and panels. It was suggested that these events might focus on a specific theme. The example was given of the recent annual youth congress held by Cycle against Suicide who held an event in Dublin. Another suggestion was that CVS and the Forum could host an event with a view to for example bringing young people together to produce their manifesto for the future.

Linked to the idea of events, there was some support for the idea of a smaller scale themed approach to engagement, whereby young people from different areas could be brought together by CVS and the Forum to discuss specific themes or issues such as paramilitarism, sectarianism, etc. One contributor suggested that the entire process of engagement needed to be “themed, facilitated and purposeful”. The Conference Survey also identified support for this option: it scored 15 points out of

¹¹¹ Hamber 2016, p. 4

¹¹² The NICCY Youth Panel is made up of children and young people who share their experiences and thoughts with the Commissioner and her staff and help NICCY make decisions about issues that affect children and young people” (<http://www.niccy.org/about-us/youth-panel/>)

a possible 26. One contributor felt that a thematic approach was the only way to engage as otherwise the work would be too unfocused, commenting: “Keep it thematic, don’t go in on everything, go in on specific themes”.

Some contributors were opposed to a thematic approach, with one contributor saying: “No, when dealing with children and young people, you need to deal with them in their own communities. They will not travel – listen to them, what are their needs and meet their needs. Get the funding issue out of the way, there are great projects in communities already – there’s no need to set up new stuff”.

5.5 Review of Forum membership

There were mixed views, and considerable uncertainty and concern about reviewing the existing Forum’s membership to include a proportion of young people. There was concern that it would be difficult for: “a small number of young people to be ‘dropped in’ to the Forum as it currently stands”, yet, as one contributor put it, it would not be possible to have young people there in substantial numbers as the Forum needed to be representative across a wide range of groups and identities.

There was concern about how young people would cope with joining the Forum, with one contributor commenting: “The Forum is a stressful place - if young people are there, it needs to be supported”.

One interviewee expressed the view that it was important to have life experience when sitting on the Forum, commenting: “There is room for everyone at the table but I’d be hesitant to replicate the Forum for young people”. Another suggested: “It would not be appropriate to bring young people into the Forum - rather have consultation tendrils out through existing services”. However, it was also acknowledged that some young people were only too aware of the issues, as they were dealing with them in their families every day for example through caring for a parent suffering from mental or physical disability or ill-health.

That said, engaging young people in the Forum’s work in some way was seen as a positive. There was a sense that this could really add value to the Forum’s advice and to the Commissioner’s advice in turn. For example, it was pointed out that the BFF Working Group had produced an Advice Paper on education but had not had young people’s input into it, and that involvement of young people would have enhanced that piece of work. The possibility of consulting young people about specific themed pieces for time-limited periods was suggested.

5.6 A CVS Youth Forum

There was very little support for the idea of creating any new single structure (for example a CVS Youth Forum) in order to engage children and young people. Contributors were more inclined to suggest “pathways” and “channels” for young people to engage with CVS and the Forum, rather than “structures”.

5.7 A Virtual Forum

There were some suggestions for a Virtual Forum for engagement, using a moderated social media platform, but there were many voices expressing concern about such an approach, considering that the pitfalls may outweigh the benefits when dealing with sensitive issues.

5.8 Engagement through schools

There was support for CVS and the Forum to work through schools in order to engage the views of children and young people – but there were many caveats and conditions attached to this suggestion, and some contributors were robustly opposed to such engagement. Twenty-six forms were completed at the conference, and in this group, engagement through schools came at the top of the list, scoring 18.

In terms of engaging school age children, there were different views on whether or not CVS and the Forum should seek to engage the voices of children and young people through school.

5.8.1 Opposition to engagement through schools

For those who were opposed to engaging with children through schools, there were three main reasons:

- Concern that teachers and staff have not had training in facilitating sensitive conversations, and therefore lack the skills. As one opponent put it: “I wouldn’t recommend working through schools now. There’s a teaching and staff development issue – it needs to be part of continuous professional development and to be prepared”. This interviewee felt that even short courses aimed at supporting teachers to do this work were insufficient.
- Concern that the system itself, being segregated, worked against this kind of engagement. As one interviewee said: “I wouldn’t go near schools for this engagement – they haven’t undergone radical change themselves”, and another: “I’m not confident that schools in a segregated school system can deal with this”.
- Possible lack of willingness on the part of schools. It is notable that out of 67 schools contacted to participate in the Queen’s study, only two agreed, both of which were Catholic schools¹¹³, which does suggest a reticence to engage with sensitive issues.

5.8.2 Support for engagement through schools

The weight of opinion in consultations was firmly on the side of seeing schools as a viable and valuable resource and conduit for this kind of engagement. Schools emerged as the preferred option for those completing the conference survey.

However, it is important to note that when talking about the potential involvement of schools in this area, many immediately began to focus on the need to *teach* children about the Conflict / Troubles in a school context, rather than on the specific question of *engagement* with CVS and the Forum. There was such a considerable focus on teaching throughout the consultation that this may suggest that for many, some degree of teaching and awareness raising about the Conflict / Troubles is seen as a prerequisite and inherent part of the kind of engagement CVS and the Forum are seeking. This reflects the recommendation of the BFF Working Group that:

¹¹³ Hanna et al, p. 60

“Schools and the wider education system should move towards a context where there are regular, widespread and appropriately facilitated opportunities for young people to discuss issues related to the legacy of the past, and building for a better future. Priority ought to be given by the Department of Education, schools, initial teacher education institutions and in-service training providers to ensuring that teachers are trained and equipped to make best use of existing curricular opportunities”¹¹⁴.

They saw Shared Education, PDMU and Local and Global Citizenship as possible routes for this work. The Working Group recommends the development of: “High quality teaching and learning resources to:

- Raise awareness of the transgenerational transmission of trauma and practical approaches that address the culture of silence;
- Help young people develop greater emotional resilience and offer a stronger focus on issues related to mental health and suicide in schools”¹¹⁵.

Some considered that specific work could be done to support schools to contribute to the proposed Oral History Archive.

5.8.3 Lessons from existing and previous work with schools

The *Prison to Peace* project aimed to prevent young people from becoming involved in and / or returning to violence. It did this by bringing former prisoners into schools to engage with students about experiences of the past¹¹⁶. The 2014 evaluation of this project could have important lessons for any future engagement between CVS, the Forum and schools.

The evaluation recommends that engagement on issues to do with the Conflict / Troubles and its legacy should form part of the curriculum, finding that:

“Educational stakeholders agree that there is a need for a coordinated approach to addressing the past in the curriculum, to ensure that the range of educational initiatives dealing with related issues can work together to maximise impact. Some favoured a centralised co-ordination; others suggested that co-ordination was primarily an issue for the principal of a school to consider in relation to engagement with external programmes. All interviewees agree however that the Department of Education’s ‘Community Relations Equality and Diversity’ (CRED) policy provided the most appropriate framework in which to locate this type of curriculum initiative”¹¹⁷.

Harland and McCready, who studied young men in particular, argue for: “the need for a more relevant school curriculum informed by, and aimed specifically at, engaging young men through a youth work methodology addressing the themes of youth justice, violence and masculinity”. The authors suggest a: “‘Balanced Approach’ of collaborative working between formal, informal and non-formal education”¹¹⁸.

The *Prison to Peace* report suggests the depth and range of systemic support that would need to be in place for this work to take place on a structural level throughout the education system:

¹¹⁴ BFF 2014, p. 14

¹¹⁵ BFF 2014, p. 23

¹¹⁶ Emerson et al, p. 4

¹¹⁷ Emerson et al, p. 8

¹¹⁸ Harland and McCready, p. 1

“existing training for teachers (in pre-service and in continual professional development) addresses not only the teaching of controversial issues in general, but also provides teachers with specific practical support in addressing the controversies associated with the conflict and processes of transition;” and that “programmes are developed to encourage inter-generational understanding of the conflict and its legacy; structured support mechanisms, such as a dedicated educational support officer and resource ‘hub’, are provided to assist schools in selecting from and coordinating the range of available initiatives which seek to address the conflict and its legacy; such coordination needs to ensure joint up approaches within and between schools and between the formal education and youth sector”¹¹⁹.

The report also suggests that the approached used in the project could be adapted to non-formal settings, outside of schools¹²⁰. Harland and McCready suggest a balanced approach between formal education, informal education and non-formal education including youth workers, youth justice workers¹²¹.

Finally, the *Prison to Peace* report points to factors which impacted on the successful implementation of this project. The key issue for the authors was the extent to which the schools were “ready” or not to engage. They considered that this readiness was evident in:

- “a school ethos focused (both in policy and practice) on the holistic development of the child and on the preparation of young people to live and work in a diverse society;
- knowledge of and sensitivity to the perspectives of parents and of the community schools serve;
- leadership trust in the teachers delivering the programme;
- teacher confidence to deliver the programme in the knowledge that they were supported by the school; awareness of the sensitivities surrounding this type of programme, in particular in relation to parental responses and the readiness of pupils to deal with issues raised;
- commitment to a whole school approach which ensures that all staff are aware of the programme’s aims and objectives”¹²².

¹¹⁹ Emerson et al, p. 9

¹²⁰ Emerson et al, p. 7

¹²¹ Harland and McCready, p. 10

¹²² Emerson et al, p. 7

Section 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.

The Green report, which surveyed over 100 statutory and non-statutory service providers, concluded in 2000 that:

“...opportunities for children’s and young people’s involvement remain sporadic and initiatives tend to be short term and ‘project’ based. There is still a long way to go before their views are taken on board as a matter of course and are seen as being at the heart of future policy making, rather than an add on or afterthought. If children’s and young people’s voices are to be heard and more importantly, acted upon, a concerted and proactive approach must be taken across all government departments and agencies as well as at the general community level...The long term success of building a stable and inclusive society in Northern Ireland depends upon it”¹²³.

It is not clear from this research that there has been substantial improvement in this regard. However, CVS and the Forum’s commitment to engage with children and young people must form an important plank of the work of building the stable and inclusive society to which Green refers. This report therefore draws the following conclusions, and makes recommendations aimed at supporting CVS and the Forum to develop a work plan for sustained engagement with children and young people.

6.1 Conclusions

- i) There is a body of evidence demonstrating a range of ongoing conflict-legacy issues impacting on children and young people, including trans-generational trauma, suicide, segregation, sectarianism, paramilitarism, poverty and disadvantage, and disengagement from the political process. At the same time, findings suggest that the services and interventions needed to address these issues are not widely or evenly available, and that those which do exist are often operating within short term, fragmented and unpredictable funding arrangements.
- ii) There is also a high level of agreement across the literature reviewed and throughout the consultations undertaken for this research that children and young people should be engaged by CVS and the Forum in relation to conflict-legacy issues, because of the evidence of ongoing conflict-legacy issues, but also because they have a right to be engaged, because of policy commitments, and because engaging with children and young people – when done well - has a number of potential benefits for them, for their communities and for society.
- iii) There is a clear view that children and young people would be willing to engage, with some suggesting that the main barriers came from adults not wanting to face issues with children and young people, or because of disaffection from the process of consultation, based on prior experience of engaging and seeing nothing change.
- iv) There is a widely held view that different children and young people have been and continue to be impacted by conflict-legacy issues to different degrees, with some facing trans-generational trauma within a family setting, others exposed to issues relating to community safety, health and wellbeing, and others living daily with segregated education and housing, and exposed to dysfunctional political discourse on a regular basis. While it is recognised that all of these issues are deeply connected, and may overlap for some young people, there was broad agreement that CVS needs to prioritise its engagement work, focusing on those children and young people who are most directly affected by conflict-legacy issues.

¹²³ Green 2000

- v) This research confirms what has been evident from other research in the field, namely that intervention and support is needed across the stages of childhood and youth, with intervention at each stage taking different forms and potentially being carried out in different environments.
- vi) It is clear that engagement can only work well when it is done well. There is strong support for working through existing organisations who have been delivering programmes to young people on the ground, and the use of tried and tested youth work approaches, using experienced practitioners and participative and creative approaches, including a strong emphasis on co-design.
- vii) Co-operation and collaboration with NICCY is seen as a natural progression for the work of both organisations.
- viii) Successful engagement requires careful thought and planning: an important starting point is to identify and communicate clearly what the desired outcomes of engagement are: for the children and young people engaging, for CVS and the Forum, and for society as a whole. Equally important is clarity about what the impact of children and young people's engagement might be and to what extent their views are going to be taken into account.
- ix) A number of options for routine engagement were explored. The most popular option is for CVS and the Forum to work through existing organisations on a local area basis, although there is also support for themed work on a small scale across different areas, and for occasional larger scale themed events bringing together young people from across different networks and forums across Northern Ireland.
- x) There is caution about the idea of bringing young people into the existing Forum as regular members, although their input on key themes at different times may be useful.
- xi) There is little support for CVS to establish a young people's Forum along the lines of the existing Forum, and some wariness about the idea of a Virtual Forum hosted through social media.
- xii) There is support for CVS and the Forum to engage the voices of children and young people through school, although there are also some strong voices in opposition. For those who support such engagement, there are, however, conditions and caveats about how this should be done, not least being the need for such work to be embedded in the curriculum, and the need for teachers to be trained to carry out sensitive engagement through initial teacher training and continual professional development.

6.2 Recommendations

In making recommendations to CVS and the Forum, we are conscious that wide-ranging, routine engagement with children and young people is something that will need time to develop and build, and which could also require substantial resources. That said, many of the recommendations below are closely aligned to commitments contained with the BFF Working Group's current action plan¹²⁴. We are also conscious that many of the issues impacting on children and young people elaborated in this report are not the sole responsibility or territory of CVS and the Forum and will in fact require collaboration between a number of agencies depending on the issue being addressed: this kind of inter-agency and indeed inter-departmental co-operation is called for across a number of recent policy documents, including those mentioned at the start of this report.

For this reason, some of our recommendations are short-term steps which CVS and the Forum could initiate, and others are longer term recommendations which may require work on a more strategic level. All recommendations require CVS and the Forum to take into account where their engagement with children and young people sits in relation to other initiatives and proposed initiatives, so that they can avoid duplication and achieve synergy where possible. For example, in some cases work may align with initiatives under the TBUC Strategy, in others it may align with some of the proposed initiatives under the Stormont House Agreement such as the proposed new Trauma Service and the Oral History Archive.

Recommendation 1: Clarify outcomes

CVS and the Forum should clarify what outcomes they want to achieve through engagement for children and young people, for the Forum and CVS and for wider society, so that they can communicate this clearly to the children and young people with whom they intend to engage. To aid this, it will be useful to agree which specific aspects of its work require the engagement of children and young people most, for example, trans-generational trauma, paramilitarism, etc. It may be helpful to focus engagement on specific areas or issues where the process is most likely to lead to some visible outcomes or change.

Recommendation 2: Engage with NICCY

CVS and the Forum should actively consult NICCY as they plan their engagement strategy for children and young people so that NICCY's expertise in reaching children and young people, and its networks and connections, and CVS's expertise in victims' and survivors' issues and its networks and connections, are able to complement each other, in order to ensure that engagement is well targeted, well planned and appropriate.

Recommendation 3: Adopt a flexible approach to routine engagement

CVS and the Forum should arrive at an understanding of what they mean by "routine engagement", as it could be interpreted in different ways, which, we suggest, could be complementary:

- Regular engagement with the same groups of children and young people on an ongoing basis over a period of years;
- Engagement of selected groups of young people to advise CVS and the Forum on particular themes on a short-term basis (a period of months);

¹²⁴ BFF Action Plan 2015-16

- A series of one-off engagements with a range of young people in different areas and regarding different themes across a number of years, or occasional NI-wide events focused on specific themes.

This report recommends that a combination of all three approaches offers the best chance for young people to engage flexibly with CVS and the Forum, see below.

Recommendation 4: Prioritise those most impacted by conflict-legacy issues

Connected with this, it is recommended that CVS and the Forum should prioritise which groups of children and young people it intends to engage with. CVS and the Forum should prioritise engagement with the children and young people most directly impacted by conflict-legacy issues. This will mean working closely with organisations and agencies who already work with these children and young people in order to identify what has been done already, and what has worked or is working in terms of engagement, and how this can be built upon.

Recommendation 5: Use a co-design approach

It is recommended that CVS and the Forum use a co-design approach with children and young people, asking them how they would like to be engaged, and receiving guidance from the organisations and groups that they trust. CVS and the Forum should aim towards identifying young people in the various groups it will engage with who could have the potential to act as champions or animators, to encourage other young people to get involved.

Recommendation 6: Pilot achievable first steps

In making its work plan for engaging children and young people, CVS and the Forum will need to consider available resources and plan proportionally. This report recommends that the Forum identifies manageable, achievable and measurable first steps as pilot engagements. In this regard, CVS and the Forum should consider the viability of undertaking the following steps, as a way to embark on this work:

- Identify 1-2 VSS funded groups who already engage with children and young people, and consult with them on the best way to get the input of those children and young people. This should include conversations about what kind of preparation or support – or indeed aftercare – might children and young people need in order to engage, where engagement should take place, what methods should be used, how input will be recorded and used, how will feedback be given, and how regular will engagement will be.
- Identify 1-2 areas / communities considered to be most significantly impacted by conflict-legacy issues – e.g. one urban and one rural. Identify active youth and community organisations in those areas and consult with them on the best way to get the sustained input of the children and young people they work with, including the questions outlined above.
- Identify 1-2 groups of young people identified as “hard to reach” such as those in prison, or those in care. Consult with their support organisations on the best way to get the sustained input of the children and young people they work with, including the questions outlined above.

CVS and the Forum should be flexible in its approach to this work. While support for a thematic approach was mixed, it will be important to respond to opportunities that may emerge to bring some young people from different communities together to work on key issues, such as sectarianism, segregated housing and education, educational underachievement, disengagement with political leadership etc.

Recommendation 7: Direct engagement with the Forum

The Forum should review its work plan, and identify subject areas which would particularly benefit from the inclusion of the voices of children and young people. It should then agree the best ways to get children and young people's engagement on those specific issues. In some cases, this may mean going out to communities, in other cases it may mean inviting young people to speak to the Forum or Working Groups of the Forum, and in other cases it may be possible to establish small working groups of children and young people to focus over a period of months on one issue and then produce their own report, for example using creative methods, posters, video diaries etc. This will strengthen the advice papers which the Forum provides to the Commissioner on issues impacting on children and young people. The work for example on education could now be supplemented by engaging with young people across schools sectors including Integrated and Irish Language schools to draw out the concerns highlighted in the original report about the systemic barriers to building for the future.

Recommendation 8: A joint regional event

CVS and the Forum should explore the possibility of hosting a regional event in concert with NICCY with the aim of focusing on a specific theme, or producing a manifesto on a key issue. Such an event would be held with a view to increasing the visibility of conflict-legacy issues impacting on children and young people on a Northern Ireland wide basis, and should have leading politicians and policy makers in attendance.

Recommendation 9: Work with and through schools

CVS and the Forum should aim for routine engagement with and through schools in the longer term. In the short term it should:

- Pilot a time-limited engagement initiative with a small number of schools, ideally from different sectors including the Integrated and Irish Language sectors. In so doing, it should take account of the learning from the *Prison to Peace initiative* which in effect offers criteria for gauging school readiness to engage. This engagement could take a variety of forms, including offering young people the opportunity to come into contact with those most affected by the Conflict / Troubles.
- Ask CCEA¹²⁵ to consider introducing an assessment question on Dealing with the Past / Building for the Future as part of Learning for Life and Work (LLW). LLW questions usually require students to focus on "live issues" and debate and discuss different viewpoints. While this is possibly a relatively "quick fix" to introduce these issues into the curriculum, the question of teachers' readiness to engage students in these issues remains.
- For this reason, it is recommended that CVS and the Forum work with government to achieve clear commitment to formally embedding these issues in the curriculum and to therefore introduce an appropriate preparatory module into the teacher training curriculum so that in the longer term, increasing numbers of teachers will have the skills to engage on these issues.
- In taking this work forward, CVS and the Forum should build on work that has already been done in schools based projects, including teaching resources and support developed for example by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education¹²⁶.

¹²⁵ Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

¹²⁶ See www.nicie.org

Recommendation 10: Review, evaluate and build

CVS and the Forum should agree a timescale within which it will review and evaluate the progress of all of this work – central to this will be capturing the views and experiences of children and young people about the extent to which engagement has worked for them, what has worked well, what has not, and providing space for them to say more about how they would prefer to be engaged. This is with a view to using the learning from initial engagement to inform fuller and more sustained engagement work.

Recommendation 11: Guidance for parents

Given the extent to which the need for support and guidance for parents to have difficult and sensitive conversations with their children, CVS and the Forum should explore the possibility of producing a process guide for parents on how to have sensitive conversations with children about difficult issues.

Recommendation 12: Identify resources

Because routine engagement requires resources, CVS and the Forum should seek appropriate routes to resource the work. Peace IV devotes €17.6m to the victims and survivors sector, and children and young people are also a key objective¹²⁷.

¹²⁷ See

http://www.seupb.eu/Libraries/PEACE_IV_Programme_Guidance/PIV_CitizensSummary_English_Version10.sflb.ashx

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