

‘A VOYAGE *of* DISCOVERY’



Author: Marie Crawley

EXPERIENCES OF THE RIVERBROOKE
CROSS-BORDER INITIATIVE

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On behalf of the Management and Staff of the Riverbrooke Cross-Border Initiative I would like to thank most sincerely everyone who made this report possible. To all the interviewees for the honesty of their shared experiences, to Libby Keys OBE for her insightful foreword, to Mary Daly and John Burke for giving so generously of their time, expertise and support to the research sub-group on a voluntary basis, and last but by no means least to Marie Crawley for her commitment and integrity in putting together this report.

This is an excellent report. It charts the 'voyage' of the Riverbrooke Cross-Border Initiative and what a long way we have come from our first hesitant cross-border meetings. However, the report is also challenging, reminding us, in case we might rest on our laurels that we still have a long way to go. There is no executive summary with this report. It is a report which charts the often painful journey of peace in rural communities and needs to be read in its entirety.

Hugh Kelly
Riverbrooke Steering Committee



The author would like to thank the twenty four people from both Riverstown and Brookeborough who were interviewed as part of this research project. Each interviewee gave generously of their time and thinking and they did so with honesty and open-ness. For this, I am very grateful.

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Marie Crawley
Researcher

FOREWORD

Reading 'A Voyage of Discovery' is a voyage in itself – of reflection, of appreciation for participants who displayed both civic leadership and civic courage, and of project workers and a management group who created a vision and held it throughout. The research was undertaken thoughtfully and with commitment to locating the learning with sensitivity and respect.

So often when we hear the word 'learning' eyes slide to the floor or the ceiling – taking the time for a bit of honest reflection is seen as a bit of a luxury rather than essential. But committees and groups that include a process such as this can clearly point to the benefits – better and more honest relationships, more effective working practice, and a stronger sense of commitment to the group or project. And a group which chooses to share this learning rather than protect it, it is an important asset for the rest of the community.

Peace building work varies considerably in its content and impact. Over the years, we have seen many different approaches, and gradually we are discovering that it isn't an event, or a single piece of practice, but rather a raft of different approaches. Good peace and reconciliation work creates a space where people can learn new things about themselves and others different to them. It isn't about giving a platform to re-assert old positions, and to put it bluntly, it is always very hard work, not the 'soft' outcomes so often referred to – as they say, only soft if you aren't doing it.

This project enabled contentious themes to be explored in a new and more understanding manner, and helped people move beyond some anxieties and fears, and at the very least start to name sensitive issues that would otherwise have been left unspoken. People talked about 'prejudgements' they may have had – where what we have been told about 'the other' is accepted over the experience of meeting with them, and there was real honesty about the tendency to make assumptions about how the other person might think or react. But – the move from 'talking about' to 'talking with' opened up all kinds of new possibilities.

The skills of honest and open dialogue are going to be required more and more in this community, where avoiding having any kind of sensitive debate is often a well honed art in itself. In this report, we read of a project with an emphasis on relationship building with a strong value of people being able to do more, learn more, and be more creative and effective through strong relationships.

But we are left with a sense that this is a 'start' – that it should be seen as something to build on rather than conclude. In this research there is a story about how local communities hold the tension between political rhetoric and reality, how they can give leadership to the 'leaders' by taking on challenges and showing possibilities, and finally, how they can show how to meet more as equal citizens and less as representatives of traditions and groups. In this respect, it is a story of hope for our community.

Libby Keys OBE

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I. RIVERBROOKE – ITS HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The Riverbrooke Cross-Border Initiative is the work of a partnership that has been in existence since 1995 between Riverstown Enterprise Development (Sligo) Ltd and Brookeborough & District Community Development Association, Co Fermanagh. The partnership, developed through a shared interest in vintage and community development, has grown from a tentative relationship between two groups with a few casual exchanges to a full-time project with a large programme of activity employing 3 staff. In its first three years, it secured the participation of almost 600 members of both communities. In the last two years Riverbrooke has organised more than 50 cross-community/cross-border events.

Despite at first seeming geographically distant, Riverstown and Brookeborough are very natural partners, with both development groups having a similar ethos, history, and experience. Both groups were formed in response to local need and both have undertaken significant capital projects. Their village profiles are also very similar. Riverstown and Brookeborough are small rural villages, by-passed by main roads and with large agricultural hinterlands. Both communities are mixed religion and each has experienced varying degrees of trauma as a direct consequence of partition and the more recent Troubles.

After working together for a number of years the partnership received funding in 1999 (Under Peace I) for a feasibility study to explore the potential of working together. This was followed by a training project in 2000. This activity built confidence within the group which then began to consider the potential for extending the work out to both Riverstown and Brookeborough communities. In 2002, Peace II funding administered by the then ADM/CPA (now Border Action) was awarded to the Riverbrooke Cross-Border Initiative and in October that year the first member of staff was appointed.

The project was jointly managed by both Riverstown and Brookeborough Development groups

through a steering group of six people. The steering group endeavoured to be representative of the geographical, religious and cultural make-up of the development groups. In 2005 membership was increased to eight people to achieve gender balance. This group meet with staff regularly to ensure the management and development of the Riverbrooke Initiative. The day to day work of the project (which includes designing and managing the individual projects within Riverbrooke) is managed, implemented and steered by the Project Co-ordinator. There are two project administrators, one each in the Riverstown and Brookeborough offices.

Introducing a cross-community/cross-border, peace project to the wider community was not particularly easy and the management decided in the first instance, to run a range of activities designed to capture the interest and imagination of a variety of people in the local communities through a programme of shared interests. Activity was divided into a range of interest areas - environment, sport, culture, heritage and craft, vintage, history, training, debate & discussion and creative writing. Basic contact type activities were offered e.g., dry stone wall building, IT for men, environmental fun days, inter-school debating and writing competitions, craft classes etc. These events were the cornerstone on which the project was built and provided a space where people could come together to work on a project and begin to get to know each other. For many participants these activities provided an opportunity to cross the border for the first time (or the first time in many years). It also provided an opportunity to get to know people within local communities as well as people from across the border.

As the Riverbrooke Initiative developed, the focus of the work changed and the level of peace building deepened. As the level of trust and friendship developed within the groups participants were increasingly ready to be challenged and to engage in a series of ongoing discussion groups and residentials. A

significant milestone in the development of the project was the participation of the management committee in the work of the project. The committee felt that it could not ask the communities to become involved in this challenging work if they themselves were not willing to partake in difficult conversations. Today they would recognise the fact that rather than destroy their working relationship as they feared it might, having the 'difficult conversation,' has actually made them a stronger, more cohesive group.

Since 2002 a number of interest groups have been meeting on a regular basis; women, young people, inter-schools, church, management, cultural, art, etc. and they engage in a wide range of challenging discussions.

In 2006 the project hosted an international conference exploring peace in post conflict societies. This was a very significant event for the Riverbrooke Initiative and marked 10 years of cross-border working. But for participants, the real success of the project is better seen in the smaller projects; the production of history books, the youth DVD, the 'hands of friendship' wall hanging. These and other symbols place markers in the communities of Riverstown and Brookeborough of people who had the courage to get involved in the project and make a contribution to the peace process.

The theme for the 2007/2008 women's programme was 'exploring the impact of the conflict on women' and they met with women from a variety of backgrounds, rural/urban, north/south, protestant/catholic, community workers and former paramilitaries. As they listened to and engaged in a story not often told, they reached a deeper understanding of each others experiences. Identity was the subject under discussion for the art group. They used a combination of art and conversation to explore their sense of place, community and country.

Faith was the topic for the churches group. They met with both clergy and laity and shared different experiences of faith and ministry from a variety of world cultures and religions. Visits to different Christian churches, particularly in their own communities proved a profoundly moving experience

which led to attendance at special services in different churches.

The youth programme included a series of lively discussions around good relations, prejudice, racism and how to deal with difference. While the Management programme had 'taking risks for peace' as their theme which emerged from the 2006 conference. They met with individuals from a variety of political backgrounds who had taken great risks for peace and they explored the challenge peace presented them with on both a personal level as well as from a management perspective.

These conversations were held through a series of facilitated residencies, on-going discussion groups and informal social time. Participants went on study visits and hosted guest speakers, they met with community leaders, former combatants, clergy and church groups, women's groups etc.; all in an atmosphere which provided an opportunity for the sharing of stories. This proved a very powerful experience for all involved. Sharing and discussion within the groups became more personal and moving to a deeper level as the project progressed.

In 2008 management, staff and participants can look back on the work of the Riverbrooke Cross-Border Initiative and know that the project has been very successful. However there is undoubtedly still much work to be done. There are still many voices to be heard and many stories to be told...

Bridie Sweeney

Project Coordinator

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

In 2006, Riverbrooke decided that it was an appropriate time to reflect on its 13 years' experience as a cross-border, peace-building project. To that end, it commissioned research aimed at providing participants with an opportunity to comment on and assess the value of the project, to tell personal stories of their 'journeys' within the project and to document the learning from the initiative. It was further intended to solicit feedback from members of the community who had chosen not to assume an active role in the project.

Twenty four one-to-one interviews were conducted as part of the research. Eighteen of those interviews were with people who had been either actively involved on the management group of the project or a participant on either the cultural, women's, churches or young people's programmes. Six interviews were conducted with members of the community who had chosen not to assume an active role in the initiative but who are active prominent members of their respective communities through other fora. The profile of the interviewees breaks down on a 50:50 basis on three fronts; men / women, Catholic / Protestant and living North / South of the border. All interviews were conducted by the researcher. The findings within this report are based on the transcripts from all twenty-four interviews. An advisory group comprising the project coordinator, project evaluator and a facilitator who had worked on a number of the Riverbrooke programmes was formed to advise on the parameters of the research and to comment on report drafts.

The Riverbrooke project was a challenging initiative, a challenge which is reflected in the diversity and breadth of opinions expressed throughout this report. Many community based peace building projects take place with one group of people who had a particular experience of the conflict, for example, ex-combatants, Northern Protestants, Southern Catholics. The peace building initiative facilitates their engagement with other parties to the conflict.

The Riverbrooke project however, had a considerable mix in the room from the beginning; Northern Catholics, Northern Protestants, Southern Catholics, Southern Protestants, former members of the British army, the RUC and victims of the conflict. The only notable absence was those involved with either Republican or Loyalist paramilitary groups. As such, the project was close to being a microcosm of the conflict with all the complexities and perspectives that brings to discussions. This report similarly presents a mixed bag of opinions and perspectives.

In reality, the research became more than a fact finding exercise on the experiences of the programme. For many of the participants, the interview space became one that was almost cathartic. Interviewees disclosed information and thoughts that had not been disclosed through the various group processes that were undergone in the course of the programme. Many of the interviewees had given a great deal of time to reflecting on their experiences of the programme and the richness and robustness of the interviews was testament to that. The reflective time was clearly beneficial and indeed would suggest sufficient grounds for more in-depth discussions on a subsequent programme.

Such was the volume of information received; this report is a summary of the findings. In particular, the findings from the interviews with those who had not actively participated in the project have not been documented to the extent initially envisaged. However, the wealth of information gleaned in these interviews will be analysed by the project and used in the design of any future phase of the project. Quotes from the interviews are used throughout (in italics). Any references to people or places have been removed to maintain the confidentiality guaranteed to interviewees throughout the process.

The report is entitled 'A Voyage of Discovery', which is a quote selected from one of the interviews and which in many ways sums up the thirteen years

of the project. It is also worth noting that it is a voyage which is still ongoing. The journey which began 13 years ago is likely to continue well into the future. As such, this report simply presents a snapshot in time. Many interviewees referred to their thinking being very different now to their thinking of five years ago. Similarly, it is likely to be very different five years hence. Thinking and perspectives will evolve and take shape as people involved in the project continue to delve, discuss, debate and both challenge and refine their own thinking.

The entire Riverbrooke project is a peace-building initiative. Principles of peace-building on a cross-border basis were an integral part of the project design, structure and agenda. As such, all findings in this report should be read in that context. Where peace-building is specifically referred to, it is with reference to work which is exclusively peace-building in nature.

3. THE CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAMME

The opinions expressed in this section on people's perceptions of the state of relationships between Catholic and Protestant communities in each area tend to represent individual views rather than reflecting a consensual or agreed opinion.

3.1 BROOKEBOROUGH

Many of the Brookeborough participants in the research referred to the fact that their community is perceived to be a Protestant community (despite the actual composition being close to 50:50), a perception that was in part attributed to the fact that the town was named for the Brooke family one of whose ancestors Sir Basil Brooke was a former Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. One Protestant interviewee commented that the Catholic members of the community had internalised politicians' assertions that they were second class citizens, reflected in a belief that Brookeborough was not 'their' village. There were mixed opinions on relationships between the Catholic and Protestant communities within the area as well as on current levels of sectarianism. There was a consensus that enormous progress has been made in both of these areas but there remains room for improvement. Some referred to practices which remain within the community such as not selling land to the 'other' side of the community and the fact that Catholic and Protestant communities retain segregated education and social systems.

Some of the famous quotes of Lord Brookeborough are brought up to prove that Brookeborough is bigoted and that's not true of the present Brookeborough. For a start off it's fairly split and there is probably 50/50 in the village. There have been big improvements; the fact that we have a neutral venue here and it is well used. There are no remaining emblems to annoy anybody, so in that sense there's big progress, but there is still a lot of separatism up to a point. Each has its own

community, its own churches, its own schools and they're probably things that we cannot address until they are addressed on a wider stage, but I think we are not 100 miles away from where we would like to be.

A variety of other opinions on the state of community relations within Brookeborough included the following:

- ~The situation in terms of community relations is not far from what an ideal situation would look like;
- ~The parades issue is now going smoothly which is an indicator of progress in community relations;
- ~It is a town with a neutral venue which is used by a wide range of community groups;
- ~It is a closed community which is reluctant to change;
- ~There is room for improvement in relationships between both communities;
- ~There is little cross-community attendance at events which are associated with one section of the community only;
- ~There is little real contact across communities and segregation is alive and well;
- ~Communities still support businesses of the same religion;
- ~On the surface relations are good and people look out for each other;
- ~There remains a section of the population which is resistant to change and
- ~Changes have taken place over the years reflected for example in a willingness to shop and trade in businesses of the 'other side.'

Some participants in the research also referred to the complex nature of relationships within the community on an intra-community as well as inter-community basis where the willingness of some to move forward in terms of community relations and the

pace at which they do so is influenced by others within the community who are at best less open to good community relations and at worst resistant to change.

I think there are still those within the communities who are trying very hard to undermine what is going on...there have been several incidents which were definitely meant not to be conducive to a good relationship between the two communities.

Finally, reference was made to the way in which society is constructed which makes it difficult to develop relationships on a meaningful level.

I think it's difficult - if you're talking to someone on a superficial level on the street about the price of groceries - I don't think you can introduce something political as such - I think the opportunities maybe aren't there as much as one would imagine. Sometimes, we're not working together in the same places. I've always worked with Protestants, I went to a Protestant school, I went to a Protestant grammar school, I went to a Protestant college, and I've always worked with Protestants - that's the community that I work in, that's the community that I live in.

3.2 RIVERSTOWN

The majority of the respondents in Riverstown referred to a healthy state of relations between Catholic and Protestant communities. However, as in the previous section, there were some specific comments in relation to the nature of relationships:

- ~ The Protestant and Catholic communities are actually segregated at an early age through a separate schooling system;
- ~ There is an excellent working relationship between both communities within the project itself;
- ~ The community can be closed and inward looking
- ~ The small numbers of the Protestant community makes its members conscious of belonging to a

minority community. Practicalities such as having sufficient numbers to keep schools open and run 'socials' serve as reminders of the small size of the Protestant community. Protestant interviewees noted however that Catholic members of the community do not contribute to this in that they do not make people feel that they are a part of a minority community.

We have an excellent working relationship with our Protestant community here and I have to say that each and every one of the directors of the Riverstown Folk Park, from the Protestant side of it, would at this stage be very good personal friends of mine. I would say there is nothing I wouldn't discuss with members of (the Protestant community on the committee).

One of the interviewees from the southern Protestant community spoke of the perceptions and beliefs of southern Protestants. Reference was made to there being considerable disquiet about inter-church marriages, albeit amongst a minority. Reference was also made to the fact that some Protestants still retain a sense of superiority over their Catholic neighbours which is reflected not only in having that sense and retaining that belief but also in terms of expectations and what social behaviour is acceptable within the Protestant community itself. This, it was said, is mirrored by the retention of a Catholic sense of inferiority, a view that was also expressed by some Catholic interviewees (from both North and South).

3.3 THE PARTICIPANTS

Participant experience of the programme, the nature of their participation and indeed the journeys they needed to make as part of a peace building process was of course always going to be greatly affected by where they as individuals were 'coming from'. Individual experiences, perceptions of people from a different community / religious background or from the other side of the border and the information and perspectives they had been exposed to during their lifetimes were all likely to be factors which influenced people's approach to, and experience of, the programme.

3.3.1 MOTIVATION

For the majority of people, the factor that motivated them to get involved in the initiative at the outset was their commitment to the work of their own community project, be that in Riverstown or Brookeborough. The cross border initiative was seen as an extension of that. For others, the motivation arose from seeing an opportunity and wanting to follow it through or personal contact with, and encouragement from, people already involved in the project. A smaller number of participants had a deeper motivation that was concerned with working to bring communities that had been divided by conflict closer together or trying to alleviate the damage that had been done to each community.

I felt if there was any small part I could play in trying to bring our two communities closer together or to try to encourage other people to bridge the gap as it were and I think that was really my biggest motivation.... I think just because we mix with one another doesn't lessen our own beliefs or anything else.

Interviewees were also asked to comment on what motivated them to stay involved in the project. In particular, members of the management group were asked to comment on this given the considerable time commitment required. There were mixed responses. For some, retaining factors included enjoyment of the programme, the continued opportunity to meet new people and the formula which the project developed which enabled the group to combine skills based activities and learning. Most of the Northern participants referred to 'not being quitters' and their resolve in staying with something from once they had given an initial commitment.

When I start something I like to keep going at it, I don't like to give it up too quickly.

The majority of the Southern interviewees referred to the friendships they had developed with people in the North as being the primary factor that kept them involved. Seeing the positive effects on the local community was also identified as a key motivating factor.

If it wasn't for the friendships, the project wouldn't have lasted.

Most of the people actively involved in the management of the project spoke of the work of Riverbrooke in delivering peace-building outcomes as the motivation for their continued involvement. They realised the project was making a difference in terms of contributing to the bigger picture peace process. Southern people in particular commented on the ways in which Northern participants seemed to benefit from the process. They assumed a strong sense of responsibility in continuing to play an active role in that process.

I would have to say the one thing that really did keep me interested was the people in Brookeborough and what they were getting out of it.

The fact that we seemed to be making progress and that there was more to be achieved and that it was a vital contributor to pushing on and helping the peace process here... I think all community involvement (contributes to peace building); cross-border work, but particularly the depth that we went with Riverbrooke, certainly we created the ledge that was filling in below the politicians. They were fit to jump, they weren't jumping out of a ravine, they were jumping off ledges that community groups had built.

I suppose seeing the benefits of the project actually on the ground in Brookeborough and seeing people actually coming to the Station House to events that they never would have come to before. I think that's why it has been good, it has been a slow process because people have been able to sit back and watch what's going on and then see 'well it's no threat to anybody'.

3.3.2 EXPECTATIONS

Given the journey which subsequently began and which was embarked on with enthusiasm and commitment, it was interesting to note that participants had a very low level of initial expectations. This was one topic of discussion in which there was total consistency in the responses of the participants. None of the interviewees had a vision of where the project might lead or how it might develop.

Participants approached the project with an open mind, they were satisfied to 'go with the flow' and there was no prior sense of what they were 'getting into'. The learning and insight into the Troubles that evolved and the conversations that took place were certainly not an outcome of initial intent or expectation.

I had no sense because we had never been involved in anything like that before. I had no idea where a cross border relationship would lead me because I had no other opportunities (for engaging in such a relationship).

For some of the participants, their initial expectation focused mainly on the tangible benefits for the two areas involved. For the young people, there was a simple expectation of learning a new skill. While the project delivered on the tangible outputs as expected, participants were pleased at the direction it took and where it led them on a personal level. Participants had initially gotten involved because of their common interest in the subject matter being discussed or worked on whether that was vintage, the arts, quilt-making, etc.. The peace building work evolved as an integral part of these practical skills based activities.

Given that the expectation or motivation for getting involved was quite different from that which manifested, some of the conversations people were exposed to did not come easily. Participants were unprepared for the conversations that did take place.

The conversations which developed...the aftermath was such a mixture of feelings, because you would be shocked at some of the things people would say. You would get your dander up about it because that underlying animosity was there all the time.

There was one notable exception in terms of motivation. One of the Northern interviewees referred to his motivation as being to work towards overcoming the effects of the Troubles.

From within myself it was a necessity that some effort had to be made to cross the chasm that was always there, but the Troubles had magnified and Riverbrooke was going to bring it to another level.

4. THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE OF THE PROGRAMME

You'd read about it (the Troubles) in the paper, you'd hear it on radio and television and yet it is only when you get into a little group like we got into that you really go deep down into the terrible, terrible time the Troubles were....we certainly wouldn't have had a clue what was really going on up there.

For the majority of participants the experience of the programme was a profound one. In describing their experiences, people used words like 'excellent' 'life changing', 'a revelation' and the phrase which emerged time and time again was 'eye-opener.' The most striking element of the combined experience of the programme was its breadth and depth. The programme affected people on many levels and they experienced it on many levels. This depended on the group to which they belonged and the depth of discussion they themselves opted to engage in.

For the Northern participants, the programme was a 'lifting of the lid' on conversations which previously couldn't have happened and on subjects that previously weren't discussed. It enabled people to enter new territory both metaphorically and literally in that people crossed thresholds of buildings and community boundaries that were previously considered the territory of the 'other side'.

For the southern participants, the programme was the gateway to the North and the experiences of its people. In the course of the programme, people overcame physical fear, fear of their own identity and fear of the identity of others and what that means. They referred to the depth of their learning in relation to the Troubles in the North and the extent to which people in the North had been affected by them. The programme essentially brought the Troubles to life; people's prior experiences had been informed by media headlines and reports, now they were hearing how it affected people on a day to day basis.

The experience of the programme generated a range of emotions in participants. For example, one inter-

viewee referred to an incident that involved being patronised by the Orange Order, being made to feel laughed at and also being very surprised that the attitudes of the Order seemed to be stuck in time.

He was pontificating and scolding and giving out, just the same as the Catholic church was 50 years ago, that they were right and everything else was wrong and that's how it came across for me. He really did annoy me.

The difficulty of challenging perspectives that made one uncomfortable within a group context was noted compounded by the frustration generated by feeling one was not in a position to challenge. The interviewee noted it was likely that others were thinking along similar lines (but this was not something which was discussed after the event):

In contrast, for the young people, the experience of the programme was not characterised by political overtones, but rather it provided them with an opportunity to develop both social and practical skills. Those on the management group referred to the experience as one of involvement in a process intended to bring about change. There was an element of surprise at the slow pace of change but a strong sense of learning and realisation that change is something that comes about slowly. There was also a realisation that the project was part of something bigger.

I think we are all looking for this magic wand so that we can just bring the two communities together. I think it will take a long time.... Bring the two of them (to a place) so that they think as one group.

4.1 PERSONAL REACTIONS

The majority of interviewees indicated that they were not surprised about their personal reactions to anything they heard, saw or were exposed to. There were some exceptions. These include reactions to places / events which they previously had not visited and to people and perspectives they previously did

not have exposure to. Reactions were both positive and negative. One participant was very surprised at a personal reaction when attending the Drum picnic.¹ Formerly held insecurities and self-protection surfaced in the middle of the event and this participant literally panicked. Others referred to being surprised at meeting and liking the speaker who was a former INLA prisoner. Other aspects of people's own reactions that surprised them included being surprised at personal levels of apprehension regarding some of the risks the project was taking and the boundaries which were being pushed.

Northern people don't usually ask those questions (the ones I was being asked by a band member at the picnic)...I didn't want him to know I was a Catholic; it was completely sectarian, nothing else...I just felt not safe, I don't know what the 'not safe' was but I felt really unsafe and threatened by the questions.

(The former Shankill community worker) was very clever and manipulated the situation, even what he showed us in the Shankill was very carefully controlled and when I asked him to bring us to particular places he said he didn't know where they were. I didn't believe him, he stood back and let (the former INLA man) talk.

I never ever would have thought I would be talking to terrorists really in a safe space and listening to them telling things that they'd done and whatever. I thought my reaction to them wouldn't have been the way it was either. Once I met them and they started to talk, I didn't feel a bit threatened by them. I suddenly realised they were just people; they weren't something different, that surprised me.

4.2 THE CHALLENGE OF INVOLVEMENT

The programme challenged participants in many ways. It challenged them not only in terms of what they experienced by being participants on the programme and the perspectives and people they were exposed to, but they were also challenged in terms

of having to cope with how other people in the group reacted to different situations and inputs, how they accepted certain positions and how they failed to challenge certain perspectives and indeed the perspectives they held themselves.

(There was a discussion around flags and emblems) and when (one of the Catholic members from the North) spoke about flying his GAA flag for Fermanagh...no-one said 'it's ok fly it' despite that fact that (he) lives on a road with painted signposts and kerbs!

There was the day (one of the Protestant members from the South) thanked the committee for inviting Protestants on board and nobody thought that strange - it was like he had less right to be there than anyone else.

The other thing was (former Loyalist paramilitary) in Belfast. I thought he was so slick, such a politician, I don't think he was honest... this man did time for murder...but I think it was the way the group reacted to him...and didn't see through anything with him (that I struggled with) more than himself. I think he came in with a script to sell himself to this group and I think he did it really well.

4.3 OVERCOMING FEARS

For some, the programme was a vehicle for overcoming fears. For southern people, the psychological fear of travelling into the North was broken down. For Northern people the psychological fear of going south was broken down. For others, internal fears were worked through by simply participating in conversations. Interestingly, while many of the participants in the programme referred to experiencing fear or apprehension on a personal level, this appeared not to have been articulated within group settings. In other words, while collectively there was a lot of fear in the room during certain discussions, participants chose not to 'name' this. The programme, as well as providing people with an opportunity to work through fears, also enabled some

participants to work through, unearth, reflect on and process their experiences of the Troubles.

Why wouldn't you be (apprehensive about going into the North)? You weren't sure what you were going to, you know, would the bus be blown up?

(You) were afraid to say you were a Protestant and have anything to do with the North because we were afraid if you went in and they knew you were Protestant you wouldn't get out safe.

The first night I was in Brookeborough I was so nervous.... I can still remember (the eerie feeling of) that walk down Brookeborough street. You passed every doorway and you were nearly looking over your shoulder to see was there anyone coming after you.

Any of us that had got involved in the project, we were all afraid of who we were, it didn't matter what religion we were coming from, we were all afraid of who we were. We were all afraid of things that had happened and afraid to talk about things that had happened.

4.4 HOW 'OPEN' WAS THE DIALOGUE?

This question of whether there was anything that inhibited participation in the project or anything that inhibited people from expressing their views at any point met with a mixed response. The same number of people indicated that they did indeed limit their participation as those which indicated they did not. Members of the Management Group were most likely to limit their participation with only two of nine interviewees indicating that they did not limit their participation in any way. The majority of participants in the other groups did not feel that they needed to limit their participation although there were a few exceptions.

Within the Management Group, some of the respondents qualified their responses by saying that

their input was inhibited at the outset but this changed as trust and confidence in each other developed. A feeling that ranged from concern to fear was the primary reason given by participants for withholding input. The object of that concern / fear was wide ranging and included fear or concern of:

- ~ Causing offence;
- ~ Causing hurt;
- ~ Saying something ill-informed;
- ~ Disclosing information which might compromise personal safety;
- ~ How others would react and what they might think (including from within participants' own communities);
- ~ How other people might respond or interpret motivation for being involved in the project in the first place;
- ~ Disclosing feelings or perspectives that others in the group would not be able to cope with.

Other inhibiting factors for the Management Group included; being conscious of representing the voice of your community and that an input would affect perceptions of that community, lack of confidence and self esteem, being deterred by the stronger members of the group, and self censoring in terms of drawing a line under what information might be acceptable to the group. One southern interviewee who had actually been held at gunpoint during a train robbery and caught up in the Dublin bombing commented that he did not disclose his own experiences as essentially, as he saw it, this space was for the northern experience of the conflict. Reference was also made to the format of the discussions in that it would have been inappropriate to cross-examine guest speakers or 'make them justify their cause'. For the southern members an important factor was feeling ill-equipped to participate in the discussions given their relative lack of knowledge pitched against the depth of the Northern experience.

Interviewees spoke of the possible consequences if they hadn't chosen to limit their participation. This included fellow directors being hurt or offended or a fear that the project might fall over something 'silly' being said. For the most part, the southern directors'

fear was around the response of the northern partners, although one interviewee did acknowledge being very conscious of not wanting to offend 'our own directors' from the Protestant community in Riverstown.

Definitely at the start we were all walking on eggshells. When we were all away on the first residential, more that anything else you were definitely conscious of saying the right thing rather than what you might be thinking. I think as we went on further residentials and meetings, that left. Now you'd still be conscious.... but you wouldn't tone down the issues as much as you would at the very start.

Well I think sometimes in the back of your mind you are always worried about what people will think. I would have thought originally 'what will people think about you getting involved', then you overcome that.... sometimes conversations would have got a wee bit deep. I would have followed them alright but you just sometimes felt 'I better not say that in case I make a fool of myself or something'. (I was afraid of) other people's reactions...(from) within (my) own community.

In the beginning... I was careful, I was very security minded...until I got to know people and understand them... both (in Brookeborough and Riverstown) because Riverstown had a Provisional IRA member killed in it and the family would have been there. I didn't know the whole background and you always have a suspicion of everybody until you proved that they weren't (a threat).

I think one has to feel a sense of responsibility as a northern Protestant explaining to people how one felt. I think one had to be very sensitive that we represented to those people a true picture first of all and also that we didn't have feelings exposed to them that they couldn't cope with.

Participants in the churches and women's groups offered mixed reactions to the extent to which they inhibited their participation. Those who felt they did not inhibit their participation in any way referred to a relaxed atmosphere, trust within the group, group confidentiality and the familiarity which developed within the group setting. A couple of respondents who limited participation in some way referred to not wanting to get into a confrontational situation and also the challenge of having conversations around a topic on which people have such different and very personal outlooks – faith and religion.

4.5 BREAKING NEW GROUND

The majority of interviewees in the research indicated that the programme afforded them an opportunity to participate in conversations they previously thought they wouldn't have while approximately one third of interviewees indicated that it didn't. The responses of those who participated in conversations they didn't think they would have indicated that a range of new subject matters was broached for participants. These varied from providing participants with an opportunity to have any conversation about the North, or one which acknowledged and was based on religious / political differences, to being a part of conversations with members or former members of paramilitary organisations. People also noted that the opportunity to have conversations such as these does not naturally occur in everyday interaction. Some participants never expected to have a conversation about Northern politics or one which was premised on religious / political differences. As much as the content itself surprised people, the fact that the conversations were happening and could happen because the political context allowed for that was also unexpected.

I didn't think we'd ever have conversations about (religious) beliefs and differences and maybe how we cope with those and how we deal with things like mixed marriages. I didn't think that I would have the nerve to ask 'how do you feel about that' but I was surprised by how respectful people were with their answers and with how honest they were.

One conversation (was) about perceptions held of Catholics, I found that a tough conversation, and I took some of it very personally. I was shocked at some of the perceptions held of Catholics by people reared in similar circumstances to me - as I would never have had similar perceptions of Protestants. I would have had the hard working, honest, wealthy type of idea but I couldn't believe the demonising ones that existed. I knew they existed but I expected to find them in places like inner-city Belfast not in rural Fermanagh. I was also very hurt when they were laughed off as if they didn't matter.

There was the added complexity of having to deal with others' responses to conversations they never thought they'd have (and perhaps were uncomfortable with having) or who maybe after the event realised who they were speaking with. There was also the challenge of having to process others' reactions to these conversations.

The people we met and talked to in Belfast, even the two lads that brought us on the tour and listening to the stories they told us...

I don't know if they killed or not but I presume they did.

After (a meeting with a well known former Loyalist paramilitary, one of the group) was quite upset...he came running in and he said '(He) murdered someone, I didn't know that...'

I was really cross and I said 'He was quite senior in the UVF what did you think he did?'...afterwards I did feel bad about it.

I was really surprised at how (one of the men in the group) connected with him (one of the former para-militaries) as one combatant to another...on reflection not so surprising, given that (he) had a military background and could understand or at least empathise with some of the things that (the speaker from Sinn Fein) was saying. I had seen this in other situations but didn't expect it here.

4.6 CONVERSATIONS WHICH DIDN'T HAPPEN

While the majority of participants on the programme felt that they were left with no outstanding questions, approximately one-third of those interviewed were left with unanswered questions, most of these being from the management group. Those who were satisfied with the depth or extent of discussions made reference to the comprehensive level of discussions which had taken place and noted that the atmosphere created within the project made people sufficiently comfortable to pose questions.

The range of subjects covered within outstanding questions are indicative of the breadth of the subject matter explored in the course of the programme and include topics such as; the origins of the Troubles, the influence of the Orange Order on the Protestant community, the attitude of southern Protestants to events such as St. Patrick's Day celebrations, why urban poverty exists to the extent it does, why the churches chose not to get involved in the programme, why one of the southern participants was so uncomfortable about travelling to Belfast and numerous questions regarding, and for, the speakers who had formerly been involved in or had connections with, the paramilitaries.

One of the southern members of the management group referred to the fact that the sense of walking away with unanswered questions diminished as the programme progressed in that initially people walked away with their minds full of questions but this changed as trust and confidence grew. One of the participants on the young people's project identified a question he would like to have asked in terms of increasing his own understanding on the origins of the conflict in the North which is essentially 'why were they always fighting up there'.

If we were to go back to the very start of the Troubles, why it started, we never really explored in-depth why the Catholic community was kept down so much.

It still puzzles me as a nationalist, the influence and the input of the Orange Order and the Masonic brotherhood has on the Protestant people.

(I would like to ask the former paramilitaries)

Would you do the same again, 'is there something that you would do differently if you had the chance'? I think 'what would you tell your children was your part in the Troubles'?

If you've done something that you feel you would like to do differently then can you move on from that and how do we move on together?

For those who have a difference of opinion, I would say, what is it in me, as a Protestant, as a unionist, that makes you want me now, or wanted me then, or felt then that I had no right to be in my country and to my aspirations?

I would like to meet him again (Sinn Fein person interviewee was uncomfortable with).

When I met him the first time, he really did throw me. I didn't know what to make of him, I didn't feel comfortable with him, but when I think of it now, I would like to meet him again, because maybe I would be able to speak to him and decide myself why I felt that about him, because I don't really know why I felt it - just I did....he struck me as someone who was smart or intelligent and I wonder why he actually didn't go into politics as in your normal politics, why he sort of went more the terrorist road or at least that's the way I can see him going.

4.7 REMAINING 'NO GO' AREAS

Participants were asked whether there are any subject areas which they still would not broach. The majority of participants believe there are no conversations they still feel they cannot have and feel confident that the sense of honesty and openness which characterised discussion spaces within the project meant that any and all types of conversation were possible. There were however some exceptions and again emanating mainly from members of the Management Group.

There was an acknowledgement that some types of conversations remain difficult particularly if they involve a discussion of incidents that took place in the North that may have involved or affected the Northern members of the group. A few southern interviewees suggested that there may be outstanding difficult subject matter for the Brookeborough partners. One member of the management group referred to the fact that while the project appears to be open, it is not 100% so, mainly around the topic of religion, while another suggested that despite there being difficult subject matter, if the conditions were appropriate (in that people could be honest in their responses) difficult subjects could be broached.

If I went down to the nitty gritty of some of the murders that did take place and some of the tragedies that did take place and if there was involvement from within our group, I suppose it would be difficult still for the group. I wouldn't talk about it. I'm just wondering if there would be something from the Brookeborough people that might be difficult. I'm sure there is.

I think it's possible that it would be a difficulty having conversations with people who were really, really hurt - that were totally innocent victims or their families were killed or murdered. I think it may be difficult for us to say to those people 'well look we need to move on'.

I would be prepared to come out with it (a question on the Orange Order) if the situation was right, but it's something that you don't do if the person that you want to address it to isn't at ease to give you a truthful answer so, that's all about facilitation.

The origins of the Troubles and the way in which Catholics were treated at that point remains a taboo subject for one of the southern board members and one which would not be introduced in discussions with the Northern partners. For two of the Northern interviewees there were also no go areas; one was in relation to raising awareness around the B-Specials

and the other was in meeting people from paramilitary organisations in the Brookeborough area. One interviewee referred to a conversation which would be difficult to open in the South which is how the south / southerners need to change to make the place more accessible for northern people. One of the young people interviewed wanted to know more about Northern people's identity and what it means in terms of people's beliefs. While most of the respondents indicated that all subject matter could be broached, the reality was there was a degree of reluctance around certain topics.

That question (on the origins of the Troubles) would be hard enough. How do our directors feel about the Catholic community and how they were kept down? I don't know if it's untouchable, but it would be a difficult one sitting round a table. I wouldn't like to sit opposite our Brookeborough directors and say 'do ye think it was wrong?'...I still think it would be a difficult enough one for maybe certain directors to answer.

I would find it difficult to meet people from paramilitary organisations in this area, that would definitely be moving it up a notch, because I'd nearly be afraid of meeting people who have been involved. I'd nearly be afraid to see who they are, because I'm going to know them.

I think (if you had those conversations) you'd understand more about not just what you think, what you believe is right, to understand where they're coming from.

I think there are certain problems within the group in that, how shall I put it, that some people might be a little bit concerned that their neighbours might find out that they said something. I haven't got that problem. If somebody wishes to quote me on something that I've said well that's fine with me. I wouldn't want to have conversations where people are unnecessarily hurt or people who are sensitive are meant to live with what you're saying. I think I would have to be careful, not from the point of being polite, but there are consequences when people say things.

4.8 THE ABSENT VOICES

Approximately half the interviewees did not think there were any voices missing from the programme or any perspectives that were not represented in discussion while half of those interviewed commented on voices and sections of the populations that could usefully be added to the programme. Those who did not feel anything should be added referred to the programme being very comprehensive, being 'well covered' and 'everyone' in the community being 'well represented.' Some of the missing voices were identified as being: Republican or stronger Catholic representation; more young people; men; and the active involvement of members of the clergy. Others referred to the fact that the project appeared to attract people from the political 'middle ground'. There was also reference to the 'southern voice', while being physically present in the room, being silenced by the comparative intensity of the Northern experience of the conflict. It was also noted that while the overall representation of all sections of the community was perfectly balanced; discrete components of the programme lacked particular perspectives.

Maybe the Republican or Catholic end wasn't as strong as it should have been. There were some things said at certain residentials, that I felt maybe... should have challenged.

Different groups have different voices in them and have different voices missing. Overall... I would like to have a southern Protestant voice and a stronger northern nationalist one ... and more space for the southern experience.

The middle class is very well represented, but I do feel the people at the very top and the people at the bottom are not just being fully roped in... from both communities.

(I think those who are not anti-SF do not find a voice within the group... I think that's probably one of the things that makes it difficult for people in the groups, and this would be in all the groups not just the management group, the northern people can tell a very poignant story, how do the southern people respond to that?

One lady tells how everyday when her husband's car got to the end of the street she thanked God because they knew there wasn't a bomb under it today. How can you come back at that and in any way support the people who might have planted that bomb to kill her husband, you just can't, unless you are very confident....I think (those who understand where republicans are coming from) are silenced and probably a bit frustrated as well because maybe they never get a space.

In addition to the contrast in Southern / Northern experiences being a factor in silencing people, other factors were also referred to which include a reluctance to speak out when one's voice is at variance with others from within the same community and people being inhibited because of class or gender differences. The issue of people not having a voice or not having found a voice was also referred to as being something that can change and has changed within the project through the process of group development. One respondent spoke of the success of the project in already securing the participation of unexpected voices from the community.

I think people are starting to say there are voices not in the room. They are maybe not saying it in the groups but they are saying it. I think the natural progression of the group will bring the voices into the room.

4.9 SHARING PROGRAMME CONTENTS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Participants were asked whether they shared the contents of the programme with other people in their own families or communities and if so, whether they felt a need to censor the information they shared in any way. Most of the respondents indicated that they did not discuss the contents of the programme with anyone in their families or communities because of the commitment to confidentiality agreed as part of the ground rules for discussions. They referred in particular to being conscious of not betraying the confidences of other people in the group. However, people also did not feel that there would have been a need to censor what they said in any way. Their decision not to discuss the programme contents did not reflect a discomfort with others' reactions to the topics covered by the programme or the people they met rather it reflected a commitment to the group they were a part of. They referred to the particular challenge of undertaking this work in a small community where everybody knows the identity of people involved in various community projects. To speak publicly about programme contents would inadvertently disclose the fact that some members of their community had been involved in particular discussions. In that context, a couple of people referred to a need to be cautious about what they disclosed.

Some interviewees commented on the challenge of sharing the learning from a programme like this with other people in the community. Because the outcomes are less tangible than other types of local development, management committee members in particular were aware that the purpose of the process' element of the work is unlikely to be understood by members of the community who are not involved in it. The young people on the programme referred to talking a lot about their experiences of the

programme such was the extent of their enjoyment of it, one in particular mentioned that he 'couldn't stop talking about it'.

I think some of them (the family) feel it's some sort of little adventure that we're on. They really don't ask very much about it, others feel, 'this is fine'.

(I did not share the contents). That was a deliberate decision. There was always the ground rules, the code of conduct, anyhow we felt loyal to our group and we wouldn't have spoken about - so and so said today - or it would get out of context anyhow when it would go to a third party.

If I go home and say the management went to see (a former loyalist paramilitary), I am sure that some of the people I know, know people in Brookeborough, know who the management committee is and maybe say it back.

It did (surprise people in the community, family) that this INLA guy and I got on very well) and I was surprised the people it did surprise, people that I thought would have been more broad minded. I think on our own side I had the respect to start with because they knew where I had came from, they knew what I had done, what I'd been through.



5. THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAMME

There were many benefits for both Brookeborough and Riverstown at a community level; in terms of the opportunities it afforded them, the fact that it eased the way for cross community work locally but also in terms of the tangible benefits produced by the project which will always be a legacy of the programme. These included the construction of the railway carriage, the production of the DVD and the history book.

5.1 SOCIAL OUTCOMES

For some of the participants the experience of the programme was primarily a social one and the extent to which it went beyond this varied from individual to individual. This ranged from having a purely social outcome to understanding that while the nature of the group interaction was maintained on a social level, it was underpinned by peace building principles. Participants developed friendships both within their own communities and within communities in which they never expected to have contact.

The (women from Brookeborough) told you different things about their experience in life there. It really was geared to the cross-border peace process, not directly, but indirectly. If you sit back and look at it you will see that everything you did you were communicating with the people in the North. We were building bridges.

It has been therapeutic, it has been enjoyable, it has been just that achievement of being out and meeting people and getting round the country and seeing others and seeing other ideas... I got a lot of enjoyment out of it that way.

5.2 INSIGHT INTO THE COMMUNITIES

There was learning on the similarities and differences within and between communities. The project resulted in considerable change in Northern perceptions of people from the south. It also increased understanding of the extent of the fear that exists within other communities and what provokes that fear.

I didn't realise until the discussions started within our own group just how sensitive the Catholic community have been to (the 12th).

Our flags went up and immediately they felt threatened. It had never occurred to me that was possible and yet I will go through a village where the tri-colours have been flown in the south. I'm happy with that because that's their flag.

When we got involved in this I realised that there was a fear on the Catholic side too, which I didn't really understand ... some had a fear of the soldiers.

I think they have learned too that we haven't all horns on us down here.

Some of the participants spoke with a high degree of warmth, for some, bordering on delight, of having had the opportunity to meet with people from across the border or from another religion / community background. This was particularly the case amongst participants on the churches and women's group programmes. There was a real sense that this programme provided people with something new; it opened up a whole new world of possibilities, conversations and exposed people to new information, dispelling preconceived myths in the process.

5.3 INCREASED UNDERSTANDING, KNOWLEDGE AND TOLERANCE

Interviewees from both sides of the border referred to increased understanding, knowledge and tolerance and to improved relations within their own communities as a result of participation on the programme. For some, increased tolerance and understanding was towards the situation and the conflict in a general sense, for some it was specifically towards a particular section of the population. People commented on looking at themselves and others in a different way, seeing other points of view more clearly, reflecting afterwards on what they had heard, being less threat-

ened by people of another political persuasion, learning about themselves, increasing understanding and changing how they see others in their own communities.

It would have changed my thinking. I would be more tolerant, I would think before I would act or speak. I would be more respectful of other people's ideas and quite a lot of it was enlightening.

It has been totally life changing in some ways because I've learned so much and I feel that the people in the programme have learned so much.

I would probably see the other point of view more clearly than I would have done prior to this, probably more understanding, I hope, of other people's views. I've learnt a lot.

I think it's life changing in that my perceptions have changed and I've probably become more tolerant and more aware of other people and also less threatened by those of a different persuasion or maybe of a different political outlook.

I think it just made us more conscious of making a better effort with our neighbours and our friends here in Riverstown.

5.4 THE EFFECTS ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS

There was consensus across both communities that the Riverbrooke project has made an important contribution to improving the nature of relations between the Catholic and Protestant communities in both Riverstown and Brookeborough. The project was described as having; opened up both communities, nurtured a sense of pride in each community and increased confidence within the individuals involved in managing the project, the participants and generally throughout the communities.

In Brookeborough it is sent to have contributed to the vitality of the Station House² as the neutral venue

in the town and created opportunities for initiatives that were equally open to each community. Levels of acceptance of the project within the community have changed for the better over the years. The fact that a centenary parade for the GAA was held in the town was identified as an indicator of change.

I think for Brookeborough it's been huge both in terms of them going out as well as other people coming in... you are always made so welcome in Riverstown and I think that's a north/south thing as well, a cultural thing, because the southern people are so much more easy with themselves and more open. But I think (Brookeborough) always want to return that same hospitality and it engenders a great sense of local pride and a huge pride of achievement in what they have done.

In Riverstown, the initiative is seen to have increased the confidence of the Church of Ireland community in particular and also to have alerted the Catholic community to the experiences of the minority Protestant community. It is also seen to have contributed to the acceptability of inter-church marriages. It was however noted that while change has taken place, there remains a historical hangover that marks divisions within communities.

I do think it has helped the Church of Ireland community feel more confident....I think for the Catholic people it has made them a bit more aware of the fact that maybe everything just wasn't ok, that was a shock for people. But I think maybe in the south there is a bit of resistance to it as well....age old stuff, 'they had the land, they had the power, they had everything' - that sort of stuff that we all carry, 'and if they don't have the power now so what, we hadn't it for years'.... I don't think they ever dealt with civil war, it was a terrible time

5.5 ADDITIONAL LEARNING

For others there was learning in terms of the particular role that women played, continue to play and have the potential to play in peace building within their communities. There was also learning in other areas; the young people learned from the new subject areas and from the technical side of making the DVD. There was also learning from the conference organised by Riverbrooke where people had access to international perspectives and experiences. For some, the programme exposed them to urban poverty for the first time.

The conflict in the north...if there was more women involved in the top they would get things sorted out a lot quicker...you take the Shankill women, they put bread into their palm and crossed over to the other side and gave them food. So who did it? The women! But, the men didn't want them doing it.

I always do think that if it was left to women things would be sorted out a lot sooner...there's more tolerance and they're less inclined to get up on their hind legs.

5.6 THE CROSS BORDER DIMENSION

For the vast majority of interviewees, the cross-border element was a significant part of the programme in a number of different ways. The notable exception was the young people interviewed who did not feel that the cross-border dimension held any degree of significance. Some members of the Management Group acknowledged that the availability of funding for cross border projects was an incentive at the outset. Material in other sections provide evidence that this was not a motivating factor for continued involvement, it was however a factor for expanding an existing relationship between the two areas. For some of the Southern participants, the cross border dimension offered an attraction in terms of breaking taboos and re-enabling them to visit the North, a place which had become out-of-bounds. It also offered an opportunity to establish contact with people they would have no natural path

to developing relationships with. The fact that the connection enabled contact with members of the Protestant community in the North was a significant attraction for Southern participants.

Northern participants referred to the fact that the link was with a community who were effectively strangers at the outset as being an incentive. This meant that there was no baggage and the process of relationship building could begin with a clean sheet. This would not have been possible with neighbouring communities south of the border. The cross-border element also emerged as one of the factors which facilitated and enabled the open discussions which became a feature of the programme. While the cross border element was significant and was an incentive for involvement, there was also an acknowledgment that it required courage on the part of both parties to cross the border.

The first time we met Brookeborough it wasn't for a peace resolution. From a Directors point of view it was for a cross-border project and funding... It actually happened the other way round for us; we met our partner first and then went for funding. We had a relationship with Brookeborough before there was any money available to form a cross-border project.

(A geographically closer southern community) would have been a different thing. It wouldn't have worked with me because of the security side of it. There would have been too much suspicion between the two communities to get anywhere. We had to have this kind of unknown. We knew the ones from Riverstown were carrying no baggage.

I think it (the cross border dimension) was an essential element. The fact that we had Riverstown which is just that little bit further away from the border... I think it was very good because first of all we didn't know each other to start with. Maybe we were better off knowing each other as people. We were listening as we went along to what people were saying; there was no background of someone knowing somebody else who had done something. We started off with a clean sheet and I think that was quite important.

I think also the nature of the Riverstown people who have been very, very tolerant, who have listened to us, who have maybe indulged us greatly when they haven't really necessarily the same experience. Yet (they) were prepared to listen to us talk out through our experiences... when we went to Belfast I felt we were learning through their eyes as well. We were going into areas and listening to their comments.

I think the rural experience is very different. I think in some ways the urban experience was possibly more horrific in the fact that the deeds were done more regularly, sometimes that there was more loss of life and horrific things happened. I think the urban experience would be easier healed. I think the rural area may not be so easily healed because the people who were hurt were not anonymous. They knew them and I think this feeling is going to take a long time to go away. People were fingered by those that knew them and I think that is probably the more hurtful thing.

5.7 THE RURAL DIMENSION

Some of the interviewees commented on the distinction between the peace building process they were engaged in compared with that which takes place within an urban setting. While acknowledging that there was a greater volume of incidents in urban areas; people also noted that the nature of the conflict in rural communities, which essentially pitted neighbour against neighbour makes the healing process and the re-building of trust more difficult and perhaps more long term than in an urban setting.

6. PEACE BENEFITS FROM THE PROGRAMME

6.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL BEGINNINGS

Interviewees referred to the importance of small beginnings, of communities 'chipping away' at the big picture and the fact that societal change is brought about by the combined efforts of people working away in numerous projects like this. Some interviewees also noted the importance of 'ordinary' people taking the lead in peace-building and in so doing, giving politicians their lead, their direction and their influence. One interviewee also commented that there was a limitation in how it could contribute to the bigger picture because of the confidential nature of many of the discussions. It was noted that this makes it difficult to pass on the learning. Another commented on the difficulty of measuring the contribution to the overall peace process. While it is clear that a difference has been made locally, nobody will ever be aware of the extent to which that contributes at a national level. The need to be realistic about what can be expected from a small community group was also noted.

I think anything that brings ordinary people together is good... and gets people talking in a non-threatening environment has to be good.

If you educate the ordinary 5/8 that's out there; they can have a lot of say in how a community acts and runs. It's ok for the bigger nobs to build bridges but still the ordinary person has to back it. The ordinary person can still have a lot to say about how an area works and all that can lead back to higher people.

I suppose every little does help. Our project isn't very big, but I would like to think it has helped anyway. It has helped in our area, which is all we can really expect from a small project....

people realise that people from two communities or from cross-border communities, can get along together without threatening each other.

6.2 INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION

One of the primary benefits of the programme was undoubtedly in peace building terms. Participants (particularly from the South) constantly referred to a very high degree of learning. The project was a steep learning curve on the conflict in terms of the extent to which it deeply affected people in the North and the divisions it created within and between communities. The word 'eye-opener' was repeated time and time again throughout the course of the interviews. The learning also inspired and encouraged participants to find out more about the conflict. The main sites of learning were the trips to Belfast, the spaces created within residencies and group discussion in which participants shared their stories. While southern participants learned an enormous amount from the programme, there was an acknowledgment that this was not without cost to their Northern counterparts. There was an understanding that the process from which the southern participants learned so much was a difficult one for Northern members.

I have learned more about the Troubles in the last 2/3 years than the 45 years before that, when they were going on.

I was a bit shocked about how deep those emotions were in people that I knew well and how deeply hurt they were. I think it was important that they got to tell their story and it was important that we were there and the group of people present were able to deal with that.

Definitely the residential in Belfast was an eye-opener for me anyway. To go to the different places I had heard about, to listen to people to talk about it. Also, in fairness to our Directors in Brookeborough you know listening to some of their stories. .. I was also listening to (former Loyalist paramilitary) and the different speakers we had that day and going up the Falls and going up to Andersonstown and going to the Casement Park GAA Pitch where the two soldiers were killed. You heard about those things, but to be there listening to the two guys who were ex-paramilitaries, it was hair raising stuff.

6.3 CHANGED PERCEPTIONS

Changed perceptions are a significant indicator of success in peace building projects. Interviewees in this research were therefore asked whether their perceptions of the conflict, North/ South issues or indeed perceptions in a general sense had changed in any way as a result of their participation on the programme. The majority of respondents indicated that the programme had brought about a change in some way. For some, it was a change in perception or a revised opinion, for others it was a change in their understanding, tolerance or empathy. For most, it is fair to say, that involvement in the programme has brought about a fundamental shift in how they now see or are sensitive to the conflict and its consequences. Some of the southern interviewees referred to changed emotions, in particular, an increased sadness on the way in which the conflict evolved and devastated people's lives.

It saddened me a lot, the in-depth feelings.... the Church of Ireland, the Protestants in the North and the bitterness and rightly so. It saddened me more than shocked me, I thought it's a dreadful thing that anyone would have to endure those things, terrible atrocities, it just ruined their whole lives.

Some of the Northern participants referred to changed perspectives on the south, on southerners and perceived southern attitudes towards northerners. This

included changes in perceptions that Protestants were oppressed and that southerners were a threat to the status of the North. There was also surprise at the genuine fear people in the South had of travelling to the North.

I find the Riverbrooke programme has been a great eye-opener as regards cross-border work. I think my idea was totally different to what it has ended up. I had ideas of what it was like, how down south lived. I discovered that's totally different. I think I imagined a lot of Protestant people, for want of a better word, especially in the south, are oppressed and don't have any life and it's totally the opposite... That just really opened my eyes to the fact that we are maybe led to believe things that aren't true.

I realised that the people in the south viewed the north in a way that I didn't think they would have. We have met people who have never been north of the border because they thought (it) was Van Diemens land.

My perceptions of the Roman Catholic community I think have changed.... Not knowing southern Catholics... I had never discussed with them before what their feelings were towards northern Protestants. I think that maybe they have a better understanding of how or where we're coming from as well. I think that we were both living in a state believing that the other was a threat and that somehow or the other somebody wanted to take over somebody else. It was quite enlightening to hear that these people really did not, they felt very sympathetic towards everyone, they wanted to learn about us in the north and they certainly had no feelings of territory or anything else.

Other changes in Northern perceptions included the complex one of identity as a northern Catholic and as a member of a minority community, a change in attitude towards the role of southern people in peace building and the development of an insight into Protestant / Loyalist perspectives.

I find within the programme that I have so much more in common with northern Protestants than I do with southern Catholics.... the other thing that was strange was the first time I met with the Church of Ireland minister in Riverstown and he started telling me about the psyche of the southern Protestant, he could have been talking about the psyche of the northern Catholic, that whole minority complex, it was so strange. I grew up in a community where there was about three Protestant families, yet I still had this minority complex, that was really strange.

I think maybe I would be a bit more compassionate about (Protestant and Loyalist perspectives)...I don't think what I believe has changed but I just think how I approach it now is different, I would like to think I have a bit more understanding of how people in different places think or what drives them or whatever, maybe I've humanised them a wee bit.

There was also a change in perception in the importance of North / South work and the potential role of people from the south in facilitating discussion between the two communities in the North. Others referred to increased understanding of Protestant and Loyalist perspectives and a number of people referred to being surprised at the extent of the poverty in the Protestant communities in Belfast. There was also evidence of a changed perspective on how the conflict actually affected day to day living in the North - the nature and construct of daily life. Individual responses also referred to a reduced sense of inferiority as a Catholic and changes in perceptions towards gay people, people with disabilities and the Travelling community.

(My sense of inferiority) has diminished through the whole process of being in this group....(by) just actually meeting and talking... you're doing a skill of some kind and everybody is out to try and help you're not thinking of whether that's one religion or another religion.

(It was an eye opener) to see how the Protestant community, in particular, on the Shankill Road area lived. I didn't think there were as poor Protestants in the country.

I thought the Protestants were manipulated in a big way in the north whereas now I realise that Protestant and Catholic get on in the north... other than a handful... there's that handful that I think account for the problems. I discovered the Protestant is as poor as everyone else in some cases...(in Belfast) I was absolutely shocked - the poverty and the state that both Catholics and Protestants were living in. It really opened our eyes and (we) got a whole different view as to the Troubles.

The other thing was an increased realisation that I did not grow up in a normal time. What was very normal for me and what we dismissed with humour and everyday stuff, which was actually a coping strategy, for people who weren't used to that, coming into it, that was quite rightly terrifying.....people were really frightened and I don't think I respected that genuine fear so I think in that sense it has changed my attitude a bit.

There was also evidence of perceptions and beliefs remaining the same.

But I still feel that the south didn't care and turned a blind eye to what was happening in the north, as long as it didn't effect them they didn't care, and didn't want anything to do with us and that is still there, if you come from Cork to work in Sligo no-one will pass any notice but if you come from Fermanagh you are taking their jobs!

6.4 INCREASED FAITH IN PEACE BUILDING AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Another of the outcomes in peace building terms was that it gave people a sense of encouragement that the peace process was working and permanent. It also increased people's confidence in their own ability to

be involved in peace building work and to speak out either within their own communities or within other peace building fora.

When I think of where the groups were in the beginning and think about where they are now my God it's amazing the steps people have taken, people are so brave, they are doing it within their own communities, that is the bravest thing of all.

I think it has made me more enlightened to speak within my own community and say 'sorry but that's not how it is down south' whereas before I didn't know. I had no knowledge so when someone said 'well this is what they do there' 'this is how they feel I didn't know' now I feel I have some sort of insight which I didn't have.

6.5 THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF 'OLD' ISSUES

Interviewees were asked whether they believe what are colloquially described as the 'old' issues such as ex-prisoners, victims, policing are still relevant. Most people believed that they remain relevant and furthermore that dealing with these issues should be a part of the future work of Riverbrooke, in some shape or form. Some respondents referred to the fact that these issues will continue to be relevant in the lifetime of the current generation. They note that there is hurt, pain, fear, bigotry and hatred which will take time to work its way out of society. One of the young people interviewed noted that these conversations were needed so young people could understand what had happened in the past but added that they need to take place in a way which promotes understanding and does not re-enforce or create divisions.

There were other perspectives also. It was noted that the issues will continue to be relevant because some people find it difficult to let go. Others referred to the tentative and fragile nature of peace as being a basis for a continued need for discussions and initiatives of this kind. One interviewee suggested that this is a matter which can only be decided on an individual basis while another questioned the extent to which these issues were ever relevant for people in the South. One person noted there is a need to draw

a line under these topics. While others noted that while there is a continued need for these discussions, they need to take place in a controlled environment. One person referred to the way in which the aftermath of the civil war was worked through in the South of Ireland and suggested that a similar approach is necessary in creating a post-conflict society in the North.

7. LEARNING FROM THE PROGRAMME

7.1 KEY ELEMENTS

The most significant element of the programme was undoubtedly the experience of the residentials and within that the Belfast experience was particularly significant for many. For southern people in particular, the study visit to Belfast brought participants to places which had previously only been media images. It brought the reality of the conflict to life and had a considerable effect on participants.

The churches programme was also identified by a number of people as being particularly significant. It appears to have been a watershed for people in that it enabled people to cross a barrier in terms of visiting each other's places of worship. Some described the project in almost emotional terms and there was a strong sense of the importance of occasion in some of the church visits.

Other significant elements of the programme included meeting the women from the Shankill road, the international conference organised by the project, the open-ness and honesty with which people approached the work, the supportive environment created and the experiences of members of the minority communities on each side of the border.

But for me the whole thing that really, really stood out....the pair of guys, the INLA and the UDR guys... they were speaking so flippantly about it all, maybe it wasn't flippant, but to me it was flippant. They were jousting over and back with one another, maybe scoring points, I don't know, it was all very jovial. But the INLA man who said 'be prepared when you ask questions you mightn't be prepared for the answers' like they were going to tell the truth, like they were going to be very graphic and they were. They told the truth and they just spoke of it as if it was just another day's work, as if it was a builder or teacher... that really stood out for me.... I would have thought I was well versed in reading the paper but I really knew nothing.

There wasn't one Protestant on the outing that particular day from Brookeborough that had stood in the Catholic church in Enniskillen. It was a big shock for me to discover this and I was absolutely thrilled with the joy of everyone when we were leaving each different individual church.....there was a joy, there was a closeness...I think there was a relief on a whole lot of the people that here we are after all this number of years and we're able to go into one another's church.

In terms of their own individual learning, the majority of interviewees indicated that there weren't any particular points in the programme at which learning suddenly fell into place. Some referred to the process as being one of 'a gradual drip of understanding'. There were however some exceptions. Interviewees identified particular moments which brought about clarity for them. This was either in terms of where others were coming from or on the impact of the conflict. This included meeting people who were formerly involved in the paramilitaries and developing respect for the journeys they have taken, becoming more aware of unionism, developing an understanding that there were people who didn't know what was going in the society, being exposed to the emotion of other people in the group and realising the depth of the pain experienced by others.

7.2 SUCCESS FACTORS

A number of factors that contributed to the success of the project were identified. Essentially, this was the good practice that the project meticulously adhered to. The success factors can broadly be broken into three distinct areas; structure, use of varied working methods and process. This section outlines the success factors of the programme as identified by interviewees.

7.2.1 STRUCTURE

~ The partnership structure comprised of members of

the management committees from each of the areas and there was a sense of equity between both partners in the management of the initiative. There was no dominant partner.

- ~ The management committee was sufficiently committed to and had sufficient faith in the project from the outset, despite there being a lack of clarity at the beginning as to how the project would develop and in what direction.
- ~ There was a strong sense of ownership by the management committee and a lot of support provided by its members to the work of the project.
- ~ The project employed staff in each of the two villages, thereby ensuring a continuous visible presence in each area and creating a sense of equity.
- ~ Ongoing support and a space in which to discuss and 'air' ideas was provided by the project evaluator.
- ~ The employment of a development officer who had a vision for how the project would develop and the ideas necessary to both realise that vision and stimulate interest in participants and management committee members alike.
- ~ The background work which had taken place in Brookeborough was important. One example which was cited as being particularly significant in terms of laying groundwork was the visit of President Mary McAleese.
- ~ Having strong facilitation for all group discussions. This supported the development of confidence in individual participants so they were put at ease and found it easier to speak out.

(The Management Committee) had to be 100% behind it because a lot of the stuff was hard for both areas and they were in complete support and I think they grew more and more excited about it...I think they had really had good intentions from the very start, they may not have had a plan, they may not have known how to get there and I think that was ok because that was my job to put the plan there. But it was definitely what they wanted and became more and more what they wanted as the programme went on and as they realised the possibilities.

We were very, very fortunate and every day we say our prayers of thanks that we were given the worker that we have. Our workers have been very diligent in what they do, they believe in what they do, it's evident that they believe, they are also very accessible and very organised.

I think that was very, very important (that southern people were there as a third party). If you get a third party as a listener, you're talking and they're listening, not really saying very much, maybe the odd little thing here and there. You probably get more honest opinions coming out of the other two parties involved. The third party, like the Riverstown people, they were very good, and I think they went back with an open mind about how things happened up here.

7.2.2 VARIED WORKING METHODS

- ~ The project identified a shared interest, a place at which potential participants could 'connect' and the work was built on from there. This was seen to be particularly necessary when attempting to engage men in the project. Examples of shared interests included stonewall building, felt /quilt making and art classes.
- ~ The project attempted to achieve a balance in practical activities and group discussions which in effect meant peace building activity with social activity.
- ~ As well as delivering on peace related outcomes, the project left tangible, practical outputs in the community such as a restored railway carriage, a DVD, a history book. Being able to 'see' a result was an important factor for some participants.
- ~ The provision of a space for dedicated, intense conversation for members of the Management Committees and the fact that the atmosphere and conditions created by the facilitators created a safe space to express views. This was added to by conversations which took place informally during meals and breaks.

7.2.3 PROCESS

- ~ The participants in the project always had 'control'. The level of working was never advanced without group participants 'having a say' in whether they were ready to 'shift up' in terms of the nature of discussions.
- ~ Participants had ownership of the groups. There was no prescribed programme. Participants in putted ideas and options and the programme was designed around their choices.
- ~ The pace at which the group developed was determined by the group.
- ~ A safe space was provided where people could share stories.
- ~ There were opportunities for people to celebrate together as well as work together.
- ~ For the peace building residencials, there was an investment in preparation time. The participants were fully informed of the detail of the programme and personnel in advance of the programme itself. This was important so that participants were aware of 'what they were walking into' and the back grounds of those they were going to meet.
- ~ A variety of speakers and stories were involved in the discussions. Where perspectives were not present through the experiences of the participants, time was invested in using other methods to ensure 'missing perspectives' were introduced.
- ~ Involving people in regular discussion was important. This built up the confidence of participants, changed the limits over time and allowed for a gradual pushing of boundaries.
- ~ The openness with which participants approached the discussions and the absolute adherence to the principle of confidentiality which made this openness possible.
- ~ The participants from Riverstown effectively became the 'third party', the listeners which enabled the northern participants to 'open up' and speak openly to each other.
- ~ The development of relationships locally which built the confidence necessary for the cross border work to take place.

The management committee went from 'no way are we meeting with paramilitaries to meeting them'. Other groups have done similar things, churches trails have gone from impersonal and safe in Enniskillen to local in Brookeborough and Riverstown. The women have moved from having speakers come into the group to going out to meet people in their place and taking responsibility for recruitment to their own group.

There was a whole relationship building done before (the) harder stuff was done and I think that was so important. You couldn't just pick people off the street and bring them off to Belfast. I think it would be very damaging.

7.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

A central 'hidden asset' in the overall programme was the nature and work of the project Development Officer. Her key role in the programme was referred to on numerous occasions during the interviews. It was her particular mix of interpersonal and group skills, experience, training, and commitment to excellent practice in both cross border work and peace building that contributed significantly to the success of the programme. However, as with other peace-building projects, the nature of the work that is required of the development officer, the structure of the project, and the provision of support for the worker leave room for examination. One issue that emerged, for example, was that by necessity of remaining neutral the worker, while attending and being a party to all the discussions, could not actively take part in discussions of the (contentious) issues raised by the peace-building programme, nor voice her opinion on these issues.

So, on the one hand, one great strength of the project was its structure and the nature of the development worker, on the other, one of the flaws in the structure of the project and one that was outside the control of the project was the lack of support for the project coordinator. She became the confidante of many programme participants and became the 'holding place' for many issues that individuals were

grappling with. There was however, no place for the coordinator to process this material or to de-brief the material she was exposed to. In interview with the researcher, she referred to conversations she would have liked to have had under external supervision or within an external grouping but which were not possible as there were no resources or structure for such support. However, even though for professional reasons, she was not in a position to participate in conversations, the programme provided other opportunities such as participating on a Peace and Reconciliation programme to South Africa. This involved working alongside former members of the police, army, paramilitary organisations and other community workers. The programme also provided exposure to other people's conversations.

On the one to one (with participants of Riverbrooke), I heard many stories, personal experiences, I felt very privileged to share in those stories. Some of them made me question my understanding of the world I had grown up in and some of the conversations made me acknowledge how unnatural the situation that I grew up in was, and how oppressive.

8. NON-PARTICIPANTS AWARENESS OF, AND VIEWS ON, THE PROJECT

This section presents feedback from individuals in each community who are active in the community and but who chose not to get involved in the Riverbrooke initiative.

All of the interviewees were aware of the Riverbrooke project and all were in a position to identify some of the particular projects that had taken place as part of that initiative. These included the women's group, youth project, schools exchange, partner exchange visits, the history project, music links and coverage in the local church bulletin.

On the whole, but not exclusively, views on the project from those not involved in it were very positive. It is generally seen to have been a very good project. Asked to comment on anything the project did particularly well, interviewees referred to the music, history and churches projects. Conversations with interviewees who had been involved were cited as evidence that people have gotten a lot out of their involvement and there was an element of surprise at the boundaries that had been pushed by the project. Reference was also made to the caliber and commitment of the people involved.

8.1 PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERS

Interviewees were asked to comment on what they thought the perceptions of other people in the community were towards the initiative. There were mixed views in response to this question. In Brookeborough, all three interviewees referred to there being a small element within the community which will always be hard to reach for a cross border initiative like this, who will not support a project such as this or who, by virtue of their lack of knowledge, are not aware of what's going on in the community.

Interviewees from Riverstown commented that their positive perceptions of the project are shared by other people in the community, one person noting that any negative views that were held at the outset have been alleviated by the work of the project. The interviewee

who had commented that the title 'Brookeborough' was sufficient dis-incentive for him to get involved noted that this view was unlikely to be shared by other members of the community as they were unlikely to have prior knowledge.

8.2 PEACE BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

All references to benefits were in relation to the peace building and reconciliation element of the initiative. People spoke of broadened horizons, changed perceptions, increased awareness, exposure to new perspectives and people being challenged in their own thinking. One of the benefits that emerged in the course of the research was the way in which information had filtered from participants through the community. Interviewees were aware of, and surprised at, the depth of the conversations that people had in the course of the programme and at feedback from the study visits.

All but one of the respondents felt the project made a contribution to the bigger peace building agenda. Reference was made to the importance of community involvement in the process as being crucial in working alongside developments at a governmental level, the ripple effect from projects such as this one and a belief that cultural links developed by this project can achieve considerably more in breaking down barriers than political movements and speeches. The person who deviated from this perspective questioned the extent to which the project made any real difference.

In both communities, relationships between the Catholic and Protestant communities were described in positive terms. In Brookeborough, interviewees referred to the fact that they have improved over time although there remains a certain degree of polarisation.

A couple of interviewees referred to the changed situation around the Twelfth of July as being an indicator of change within the community. Reference

was made to the length of time flags and bunting were displayed in the town. This has decreased considerably over the years and is seen to be an important indicator of progress in community relations. Reference was also made to changed attitudes towards the GAA. The relationship between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Riverstown was described in positive terms both on a community level between people and formally between the churches.

While half the interviewees felt that there was nothing the project could or should have done differently, reference was also made to insufficient awareness of the project and one interviewee questioned the value and intent of the inter-denominational work which was carried out by the project. The extraordinary level of enthusiasm and commitment of the people involved was also commented on.

All the non-participating respondents indicated that they would like to see the project continue in the community. For some, the rationale for its continued existence is the fact that participants have received so much benefit and have been enthused by the initiative. For another interviewee, it's because of the 'life' it brings to the area. One person suggested that not only should Riverbrooke continue but that there should be many more projects like it and more people should be afforded the opportunity to get involved, such is its value.

Three of the interviewees indicated they would be willing to have an increased involvement in the future should it receive funding to continue. In response to a question on whether there was anything pro-active Riverbrooke could do to support them to get involved, all said that the project could not do anything more.

9. A CONTINUING ROLE FOR THE PROGRAMME

There was unanimous agreement that there is indeed a continued role for the project and a wide variety of opinions as to what its particular focus should be. The most commonly articulated opinion was that the project should continue along similar lines, remain involved in the same broad areas of work, but widen both the number of people who benefit from it and the geographical area. In widening the geographical area, it was noted that to cover both counties would be overly ambitious but some increase in geographical boundary was necessary. One interviewee commented that to increase the geographical area from Brookeborough would have the added benefit of bringing in more people from the Nationalist community. While many of the interviewees referred to a need to increase numbers in a general sense, some made specific references to involving more young people, children and new communities. The young people themselves suggested that the volume of youth activity should increase, there should be more weekends and the programme should include trips to adventure centres for example. Others suggested a need to involve those who hadn't gotten involved in the programme to date. Individuals also suggested that the business community, farmers and the churches should be more involved while reference was also made to a need to focus work on the Protestant community south of the border.

I think the older people or the older generation in the village are coming to terms with things and they're very friendly towards one another. The children, the younger ones, a lot of them still haven't got involved or...don't meet their Catholic or Protestant counterparts and I think because they were born into the Troubles so they know nothing else, they believe the stories that were going round. I knew what it was like before the Troubles and I think we need to get them more involved in it.

In terms of content, many suggested that 'more of the same' is needed. All interviewees have been comfortable with the discussions, the focus on the Troubles and their affects and would like more of the same. It was suggested that the discussions need to move onto a deeper level. The programme for women and young people should also include speakers who have been more closely involved with the Troubles. It was also noted that the project has mainly had contact with people from a similar social background to the participants and that perhaps there should be increased involvement of people from working class and upper class backgrounds. It was also noted that the future content will be determined by funding criteria. The challenge for the continued existence of the project was also referred to as people commented on the demands for Directors who carry out this work in a voluntary capacity. For some, the challenge is the volume of work and time commitment involved. One of the interviewees referred to the effects it had on the capacity of one of the partner groups to work in their own area. Finally, the fact that the project is seen as a model of good practice and there is almost an onus on people to continue to make it a success was also noted.

There was also a contradiction in that people would like to see more people benefiting from the programme but this was coupled with a realisation that this will require changing something that is already working well.



10. CONCLUSIONS

This section draws conclusions from the main body of findings in the report. All observations are based on participant information. The section is divided along the lines of the four main themes in the report, namely; participants, the programme, peace-building and dialogue.

The Riverbrooke project was a highly successful initiative. It brought participants on a journey that for some, utterly changed their outlook on 30 years of the Troubles. It opened people's minds, it changed perceptions and it gave people insight into the experiences of people in communities they would normally not have access to.

10.1 THE PARTICIPANTS

- From the Brookeborough perspective, any involvement in cross border activity was going to present a challenge. There was a natural suspicion from some elements of the community to anything that had a cross border agenda, a suspicion that was placed in the context of broad political change which many people were uncomfortable with. For members of the group who had previously been in the security forces or who had members of their families in the security forces, the suspicion of a cross border agenda was coupled with a fear for personal safety in travelling south.
 - For people from Riverstown, the North had become a 'no-go' area and some participants had opted out of travelling into the North for fear of personal safety. For some in Riverstown there was the added concern of the unionist connotation associated with Brookeborough and what the cross border link would consequently entail. There was also for the most part a disassociation from and disowning of the conflict and an ignorance of its affects on day to day lives. There were of course exceptions and one of the southern interviewees had himself been held up at gunpoint and caught up in the Dublin bombing. There was, in other words, a complex set of relationships, perceptions, suspicions, fears and lived experiences to be taken into account in the design and delivery of the programme.
 - There was also a feature of the cross border partnership which was in some ways incidental, but which was also key to its success. The fact that Brookeborough was perceived as a Protestant community was an attraction for southern participants in that the link was with people who did not have a shared community background. This was seen to be of considerably more benefit than if the link had been developed with a community with a predominantly nationalist background.
- For the participants from Brookeborough, the fact that the cross border link was not with a neighbouring community but one with whom participants had no prior knowledge or baggage was important. It made the link possible for people on a personal level. Individuals or families were not associated with any events which had taken place, people knew little about the history and politics of the community and there had been no direct contact on contentious issues, such as 12th July parades. These conditions were more likely to have been present if Brookeborough's cross border partner was a neighbouring community group.
- Participation in the initiative took courage on all sides. Both Northern and Southern participants alike had fears for their physical safety in travelling to the other side of the border. There was also courage in people's decisions to get involved in the programme. While participants themselves were very clear on why they were meeting people from backgrounds that they themselves or indeed other members of their community might find objectionable, other members of their families or their communities were not privy to this background knowledge or clarity of purpose. People chose to get involved and stay involved in the programme in full knowledge that others in their families and communities might be less than happy that these contacts were taking place.
 - In this, participants were also very conscious of protecting other members of their respective community groups. While participants honoured the

ground rules regarding confidentiality in the programme they were also aware that to disclose that they had met with certain people would also de facto disclose that others had done likewise. Participants were acutely aware of the vulnerability of others and acted on this by maintaining strict confidentiality regarding programme content. There was a strong sense of collective responsibility towards, and respect for, their colleagues.

- Participants in the programme made enormous leaps in terms of what was possible in their own peace-building work. Members of the management group moved from a position of never wanting to meet with former paramilitaries to being involved in open discussion with them. Within this, individuals made extraordinary progress. Some moved from a position of expecting to challenge and condemn to 'humanising' the people involved, acknowledging that 'it could have been any of us' and 'we shouldn't be so quick to judge'. This was an enormous leap over the course of a couple of discussions and demonstrates the importance and efficacy of face to face contact and developing basic relationships at a personal level.

- There was a marked difference in the responses of the younger people interviewed compared with the other participants in the research. For the younger people, the attraction of the project was clearly in the activities, the social aspect and the challenge of developing new skills. They benefited greatly from their involvement in the programme. However, their life experiences meant that the cross border or peace building dimensions held little or no relevance for them. There is a certain degree of curiosity about the cause of the Troubles and the perspectives of others, but it was not a central concern.

10.2 THE PROGRAMME

- The agenda set by the project was a challenging one. Both communities were mixed in composition and had to be mindful of, and work actively at, securing the participation of the minority community in their respective areas. In addition, they had to involve these mixed groups in cross border activities in areas where cross border contact was not straight-

forward. The final element of the backdrop to the project was the culture of silence that prevailed around the main subject area. People in the North had a culture of not talking about the Troubles and people in the South had a culture of not talking about the North.

- The cross border dimension was an attractive element of the project for southern participants. It enabled people to address their fears, to increase their knowledge, to widen their experience in relation to the conflict and the peace process and to re-visit a part of the country which was only, as described by some, a few miles up the road but which had become an alien place. The North has been a place of negative media images in people's minds. This programme changed that. The North became a place of real people and real communities. The events of the Troubles, which had previously been images of anonymous killings and bombings, were transformed into pain, grief, hurt and sadness in the lives of people they developed friendships with. Southern participants were genuinely shocked at the toll the Troubles had taken on people's lives and communities.

- One of the big surprises (for people from Riverstown in particular) was the extent of the poverty in Belfast and in particular that on the Shankill Rd. Reactions suggested that people had previously not been exposed to urban poverty in this way. Furthermore, the existence of poverty in Protestant communities was a great shock to many people. There had been a prior belief that poverty was associated with Catholic communities in the North only. Furthermore, the poverty within the Protestant community did not fit easily with their own perceptions of Protestantism in the South; references had been made to 'big houses' and a lingering sense of inferiority in relation to Protestants.

Not only the poverty, but also the common experience of poverty between these two 'opposing' communities was a shock to people. While this was educational, for some, it also appeared to add to a lack of comprehension as to how the Troubles persisted for so long, given the commonality of the everyday experience of the two communities.

- One of the flaws in the structure of the project identified earlier in the report (Section 8.3) was the lack of support for the project coordinator. In the course of the programme, the worker was exposed to many contentious issues and often privy to the hurt suffered by the participants. However there was no provision for this, no 'space' for her to voice her own opinion or to talk about the distress she was witness to. She was a participant in all the workshops but by necessity in having to maintain neutrality was not in a position to express her opinion or challenge anyone else's. It was also necessary for the staff member to be present so that she was familiar with the issues which arose in discussions. Without this knowledge it would not have been possible to support groups onto the next stage. This was a difficult situation for the coordinator. Any future phase of the project must build in a support structures to ensure a safe, confidential space for development staff to de-brief the issues raised within the project and to enable staff to effectively support other participants on their journeys.

- While the availability of funding was a factor in the growth of the project, there are some features of this cross community partnership that should be noted in relation to funding. Firstly, the groups had developed a link prior to Peace funding for cross border work coming on stream and the relationship between both communities was already developing. Furthermore, from once the cross border project was up and running, it actually cost the project promoters, the Riverstown Enterprise Development Ltd, to host it. There is sometimes a public perception that the sole motivation for cross border initiatives is funding. In this case, the funding enabled the development of a dedicated in-depth programme but it was not a motivating factor for either the initial or sustained involvement of the partner projects.

10.3 PEACE-BUILDING

- The complexity of both living through, and working through the aftermath of, a conflict in a rural community was apparent throughout the interviews with Brookeborough residents (from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives). References were made in passing to the unusual situations which took place

in rural communities such as: belonging to the Catholic community, having a brother in the RUC and having to keep his visits and whereabouts secret from neighbours and friends for fear of his safety, being stopped by neighbours who were in the police or army and they requesting your name and address as though they were strangers, going to a funeral of a neighbour but not venturing past the church door because of uncertainty of both a welcome and your own security. They also referred to the more sinister factor of people within the community 'being fingered' by neighbours and acquaintances. Participants were aware that individuals may have been shot and bombs placed in businesses on the basis of information provided by those living amongst them. Interviewees expressed the view that because the conflict in rural communities was between neighbours and acquaintances, the healing process may take considerably longer than it would in an urban context where the 'other side' also lives in another community. In a rural community, the 'interface' is simply a field boundary hedge, the end of a lane or a garden fence.

- The challenge for some members of the southern Protestant community also became apparent in the interviews (although there were mixed opinions on this). One interviewee spoke in detail of a high degree of awareness of Protestant identity, an awareness which prevented travel to the North for years. There was a fear that one's Protestant identity would become apparent and as such would threaten personal safety. Having been reassured by Northern Protestant involvement in the project, there was also a high degree of anxiety that there was a limit to the degree to which elements of Northern Protestantism would be accepted in Riverstown, in particular prior to a visit by a northern band. There was an interesting challenge here in terms of identity and belonging. On one hand, there was a sense of common identity with members of the Protestant community in the North. There was also a strong sense of belonging to the community in Riverstown. However, when the possibility of the interests of both of those communities coming into direct conflict arose, it was a cause of great anxiety. Essentially, the situation challenged the fundamental question of identity as a Southern Protestant.

- One of the most profound outcomes of the work was the level of awareness raising of southern participants on the conflict in the North. The programme gave an enormous insight into the Troubles in the North and the extent to which people had been affected by them. The programme essentially brought the Troubles to life; people's prior experiences had been informed by media headlines and reports, now these reports were humanised as people were exposed to discussions on how the conflict affected people on a day-to-day basis. There was a mixed range of emotions in response to the stories people heard; it ranged from shock to sadness at what had happened to shock and sadness at the bitterness which remains.
- There were many elements of the project's method of working which made it successful in peace building terms or which made it possible to undertake peace-building work in the first instance. These critical success factors were as follows. The relationship between both communities had been well established before it began the process of deep peace building work. In each area, cross community work had also taken place before getting involved in the cross border project. This was particularly important in Brookeborough where work had taken place between people from a nationalist and unionist background and initial trust and confidence had been developed prior to the initiation of cross border work. When the project embarked on dedicated peace building work, this was at a time when participants were ready for it. The pace at which the programme delved, discussed and exposed people to new perspectives and thinking was determined by the preferred pace of the group. The development officer was critical in steering this course and in striking a balance between not moving people on too quickly, while at the same time, ensuring that the agenda was moved on and people were challenged in their thinking and perceptions by the programme. Participants were well briefed before sessions. There were no surprises. All sessions were externally facilitated and ground rules established. In other words, all the conditions were put in place to enable people to have trust in, and engage with, the process.
- There was also a steep learning curve for members of the Protestant community in the North around southern people, their attitudes and their lives. Participants referred to being reassured that the south poses no threat to the North. They were also surprised that Protestant people lived happily in the south and one interviewee suggested that Northern Protestants may have been misled into believing otherwise. There was an expectation that southern Protestants would be oppressed and unhappy and there was genuine shock to find out that, based on the discussions with the people they met, this was not the case.
- It was interesting to note the responses of members of the Northern Protestant community in the management group to their meeting with two different people from Republican backgrounds. For the most part, people found it easier to empathise and respond to those who had gotten involved in paramilitary organisations because their family or community had been attacked or who were disadvantaged or discriminated against in some way than those who choose to get involved in Republican politics as a result of their own political consciousness. Meeting people who were motivated by an intellectual political analysis was a much more challenging experience than meeting those from working class, disadvantaged backgrounds.
- For a programme like this there is an enormous challenge in sharing the learning. Having a strong contract around confidentiality was one of the factors that enabled people to participate openly in discussions and as such was one of the success factors in the programme. However, it also limited what participants could share with their families and communities. Even when participants felt they themselves wanted to and could share information, they held back, as they were concerned for other members of their communities. The small size of rural communities and the fact that everyone is likely to know everyone involved in community projects is undoubtedly a factor here. Future programmes should plan for this in making time for people to agree what can be shared more broadly within the community. Within the parameters of a confidentiality agreement,

participants could agree at the end of sessions what information could be discussed outside of the group with everyone's consent.

10.4 DIALOGUE

- The discussions in the project became a catalyst for awakening memories of the past and in doing so, it enabled participants to look at these events through a different filter, the filter process for this having been provided by the programme. With the increased understanding and insight brought about by the programme, the events of the past were seen in a different light. This enabled people to deal with past events in a different and more open way.

- It was also interesting to note that at the outset, the project modelled the Northern way of dealing with difference. It began by using the 'polite tool'. People listened, said what they felt could be heard in the present company or what they felt was appropriate to say. They assumed this as the default way of working. While the conversations certainly moved far beyond that, there remains an element of politeness in how the Management Group in particular operates. Questions remain for southern people in particular. They are unsure whether their northern counterparts are open to hearing those questions and are equally as unsure of the responses. There will be a challenge for the future in enabling those conversations to happen. Some dedicated work with the southern members would be useful in identifying what needs to happen in order for them to be in a position to engage fully and openly.

- Another element of the programme which emerged and was identified as a factor in its success was the way in which the southern participants became the third party which enabled discussions to take place. The two communities in the North could talk through the medium of the southern participants. Southern reactions to communities and people in the North also provided a useful gauge for Northern participants as they were honest reactions without baggage or filter. Both parties saw the project as an opportunity for it to become a catharsis for the Northern participants and southern participants consciously stood back and gave space to their North-

ern counterparts. However, while this was welcomed by Northern participants, adoption of this role (deliberately or otherwise) made it less easy for Southern participants to participate in the discussions on an equitable level. They became the inquirers, the facilitators, but it is very difficult to move from this role into one of disagreement or challenge. This was added to by the fact that the depth of the Northern experience and the fact these stories were told openly and explicitly made it difficult to adopt a contrary position. With the result, anyone with Republican, strongly Nationalist, Loyalist or simply views which might have challenged the prevalent one in the group, could easily have been silenced within the group. Whether or not this was the case is unclear from the interviews. What is clear is that some people were aware of this dynamic. The space did however become a place for Northern stories, demonstrated most visibly by one southern participant who had been a victim of the conflict feeling that it was inappropriate to share his story – as it was 'their' conflict and 'their' space (referring to Northern participants). Clearly, the North was the site of the conflict and it is therefore not surprising that this space was afforded. However, in the context of a cross border programme it is also important to note that this did have an effect on the ability of southern people to participate or to consider or articulate their own role in, or attitude to, the conflict or their own thoughts on the political solution. There was a sense of hierarchy which southern interviewees were acutely aware of and as a result, they deferred to their Northern counterparts.

- In engaging in these discussions, participants from both sides of the border were working from what had become an accepted norm. People in the Northern community did not talk about the conflict with each other and sometimes not even within their own families. People in the south did not talk about the conflict and most had totally dis-engaged from it, indicating that they had no interest in, or knowledge of, the conflict in the North. The extent to which participants embraced the process and the discussions is therefore highly commendable. It is also not surprising that the partnership arrangement began

initially using the northern method of 'polite' engagement and interaction and it was within a well-structured and planned programme that it moved onto a deeper level.

- There is perhaps one note of caution to be expressed in relation to the increased awareness that people have developed as a result of their discussions within the project. The views that people were exposed to are not necessarily the definitive views of the communities from which those views were expressed. Some ideas were expressed which were the personal opinions or perspectives of individual contributors but these were interpreted as definite statements of fact. Within a programme like this which is concerned with challenging perceptions and raising awareness, participants are frequently being exposed to new thinking. Within this context, it is also important to question the perspectives on offer, to question whether they are commonly shared within the community and importantly whether they are shared by the community of the 'other side.' Conversely, people who offer perspectives and opinions within these discussions need to be open to question and challenge.

10.5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The programme is, in the main, well respected and established in both communities. Acceptance of the programme was always going to be more difficult in Brookeborough and there were people in the wider community who, at the outset, were cynical, suspicious and dismissive of this cross border project.

This has changed over the lifetime of the programme. The programme has successfully demonstrated that there is no alternative agenda to that stated and that people's own sense of identity has not been diminished by the programme. The programme has also delivered numerous tangible results in the community and has injected life into the local community building. The fact that members of the management group who got involved at the outset stayed the course also sent out a strong message to the community that something positive was happening. The programme created an enormous sense of pride.

The programme was equally well received in Riverstown. It is well established and highly respected. Riverbrooke was instrumental in upping the ante of local development work within Riverstown, it gently moved a community which was exclusively focused on local development to openly and generously engaging in peace-building work which initially seemed alien to their own lived experience. It has created a dynamic and an interest which will not easily be rolled back. The project has essentially changed the lives of those involved, to varying degrees. But, one legacy of the project is unequivocal for those involved – the conflict in the North will never again be viewed dispassionately or with disinterest.

This report documents a 'moment in time'. But the voyage of the project and the personal journeys of those involved will continue long into the future.

JUNE 2008

REFERENCES

1. *An annual event organised by the Orange Order in Drum village in north Co. Monaghan.*
2. *The Station House is the cross community venue in Brookeborough; renovated, owned and managed by the Brookeborough Development Association. It also hosts the Brookeborough base of the Riverbrooke project.*



RIVERBROOKE CROSS BORDER INITIATIVE

Riverstown, Co Sligo & Brookeborough, Co Fermanagh

Rural communities working to break down barriers & build trust and friendship

Sligo Folk Park
Riverstown
Co Sligo

The Station House
Brookeborough
Co Fermanagh

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