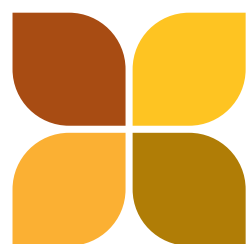




Young People Building Peace



Rural Enabler Programme
Building Peace Locally

Young People Building Peace

It can be challenging to engage young people in peace and reconciliation work particularly as many of them were born after the ceasefires and have no memory of the Conflict. Their views of the Conflict are formed by a combination of stories they hear from family and friends, the culture of their community and what they pick up from the media. Social segregation is as much of an issue in rural as in urban areas - villages are often single identity and this segregation is also compounded by schooling segregation. There are also a small but growing number of young people who feel disenfranchised and disaffected by society - factors common enough in any culture but which can be exacerbated by the legacy of the Conflict. Young people in some rural locations are also challenged by the lack of social and infrastructural resources, with rural isolation identified as a key barrier to developing friendships and extending social networks. Engaging young people in peace building work is important to sustaining peace and ensuring there is no return to conflict.

Learning from the Rural Enabler Programme

The Rural Enabler Programme used a three stage process:

- **Contact** - this stage requires dialogue with a range of groups (including youth leaders, parents and guardians and, particularly important, young people themselves). In this context, it is important to be aware that young people from different cultural backgrounds have a range of lived experiences and sensitivities.
- **Engagement** - the next stage is to develop the agreed intervention and to proactively identify, target and support the relevant individuals to become involved and engage in the intervention process. With young people, engagement needs to be interesting and challenging, activities need to be rewarding and should take account of the capacities that need to be built. Engagement with disaffected and disenfranchised young people can present particular challenges due to the lack of appropriate services in rural communities.
- **Sustaining Engagement** - the key to the success of any intervention is sustaining and supporting participation and engagement in the longer term which should be identified early in the process. Support from key individuals and organisations along with parents, schools, youth groups and other groups working with young people and opportunities for collaboration provide a mechanism for keeping things fresh and keeping young people engaged.

A Youth Extravaganza event was held to celebrate the diversity of the local area and to take part in a number of activities designed to build good relations. This is particularly important in a rural area characterised by single identity areas.

A Youth Development Initiative provided young people with the opportunity to explore diversity through interviewing individuals involved in peace and reconciliation work and producing a series of radio programmes to share their stories.

Learning: Involving young people in a process which appeals to them and which delivers learning through a creative process is successful.



Lessons from Practice for Local Policy

The Rural Enabler Programme has identified a number of key lessons that are particularly relevant to designing and implementing programmes of activities for young people. These lessons are important for all organisations including local youth organisations, local authorities, community groups and statutory organisations operating at a local level. The key lessons relate to five core peace building principles as follows.

Understanding/Anticipating Local Challenges

Facilitating peace building work at a local level requires the organisations and individuals involved and leading the process to have a good level of awareness and understanding of the local environment and local sensitivities. This knowledge will allow an appropriate and sensitive approach to be taken as follows.

- the establishment of contact with the various programmes/organisations already operating in the area
- the identification of the key players
- the awareness and understanding of what work already has been done with young people in the area

Having this information enables the identification of the key challenges and the strategies necessary to overcome these challenges. Once the work is in progress, further engagement needs to continue to ensure relevant individuals and organisations are aware of what is being planned and, where appropriate, participate in the implementation process.

Trust and Engagement

Building trust and rapport with young people is the key to meaningful engagement and ultimately successful peace building work. Initial contact with young people must be through people they trust. Working with young people requires a sensitivity to, and awareness of, local issues and concerns. Building trust against a backdrop of the legacy of the conflict can be complex. Organisations involved in peace building work need to be very aware of the legacy of the Conflict and/or the legacy of paramilitarism that can exist in some locations. Making contact, engaging and sustaining engagement with young people living in these locations can be particularly difficult and can require ongoing engagement with the young people's families and the wider local community. Building trust and ensuring the inclusion of more isolated/excluded young people can be especially challenging and time consuming and often requires additional time and resources to facilitate this process.

'A Match was Made' used football as the catalyst to bring young people from single identity communities across the border together. The project involved two cross border residential which included team building exercises and facilitated sessions focusing on the different traditions in each area. The second residential event enabled greater team building between the groups and provided space for young people to talk to one another and question some of the different traditions. A third residential is currently being planned which will enable the young people involved to further understand the impact of the conflict and to examine the issue of racism.

Learning: Physical activities which promote a common or team bond can be instrumental in beginning to build bonds and friendship as the first step to understanding.



It is important that peace building work meets the interests of young people (for example, social media) as these interests can provide an important vehicle for discussions on peace building work.

Leadership

Organisations involved in peace building work in rural areas need to support young people to take on leadership roles and to develop their own interventions and solutions for local peace related issues. This will require the provision of mentoring and facilitation training support for these young people as well as parental and wider family support. Organisations involved in peace building work also need to recognise the importance of creating safe spaces for young people to engage with local leaders and decision makers (including elected representatives, community organisations and statutory bodies). Organisations leading and supporting this process need to ensure that relationships are built with these key individuals early in the planning stage of the work.

Specialist Peace Building Support

Groups and individuals involved in peace building work in rural areas need to develop their skills in specialist peace building training to engage with young people on hard to discuss issues. This specialist work needs to be done in partnership with other local organisations to ensure the learning arising from this work can be sustained.

Partnership/Linkages

There is a need to recognise the fact that peace building work with young people is a long term activity and requires ongoing input from a range of groups and organisations. There is clearly a need for linkages to be established between organisations and groups to promote collaboration, avoid duplication and, most importantly, to ensure continuity. It is also the case that the delivery of youth work in rural areas can be a challenge where young people are scattered across a wide area and regional bodies need to take account of their obligations in this task. Overcoming this challenge requires collaborative approaches including the clustering of areas as well as communities and groups working in partnership with statutory bodies to implement activities. There is scope for local Youth Councils to work with neighbouring Youth Councils and on a cross border basis, with county based Comhairle na nÓg structures.

Making a Difference in Community and Policing (MADCAP) - this PSNI Initiative's purpose was to engage young offenders and young people at risk in a training programme which explored sectarianism, racism, prejudice, symbolism and identity, as well as how young people can contribute to making communities better. The project was developed to involve young people from a range of backgrounds and was facilitated by a meeting with the PSNI Education Officer to establish their backgrounds and their specific needs.

One outcome from this work has been the development of more positive relations between the young people from different community backgrounds. Programme organisers also believe that the training will have a positive impact on the young people's behaviour and help reduce their risk of engagement in criminal activity.

Learning: Young people at risk may also be vulnerable to engagement in sectarian and racist attitudes and behaviours; projects such as these can promote their inclusion within their own communities.



Lessons from Practice for National and Regional Policy

The Rural Enabler Programme has facilitated and supported a significant number of youth peace building projects, particularly at a local level, across both jurisdictions and on a cross border basis and is keen to ensure that the learning arising from this work is shared with policy makers at all levels.

The learning from these various interventions in many instances mirrors the learning from across the PEACE programme. Much of this work is with youth groups at the early stages of development, in many cases on a single identity basis where the focus is on the development of capacity and understanding of culture and tradition. This should then be followed by moving beyond the 'easy to reach' young people with cross border engagement on an inter-cultural or cross community basis.

Key lessons

1 National and regional policy needs to recognise that peace building work in rural areas has to be sufficiently resourced to be able to overcome a number of very distinct challenges which are as follows:

- Individual young people and, indeed, particular rural communities can be very isolated because of their rural location.
- There can often be a polite general silence about the impact of the Conflict in rural areas that can take some time to overcome.
- Minimum number requirements can preclude young people living in rural areas being able to access particular opportunities.
- Young people can find it difficult to access the transport they need to facilitate their participation in a range of activities.
- Myth-busting on the roles of institutions is vitally important for young people with opportunities to engage in dialogue and learning to challenge beliefs.

2 Organisations funding and supporting youth work also need to be encouraged to recognise the importance of the five core peace building principles and supported to embed these principles in their funding guidelines.

- Understanding and anticipating local challenges
- Building trust and engagement
- The role of strong leadership
- The importance of specialist peace building support
- Partnerships and linkages need to be embedded in the policies of organisations working with young people across Northern Ireland and in the border counties. The strengthening of the partnership between the National Youth Council of Ireland, regional youth organisations in Northern Ireland and the Youth Divisions of the Education and Library Boards would provide enhanced opportunities for young people in rural communities.

3 There is a need for a mechanism to be established to support youth organisations north and south of the border to share the learning arising from their peace building work.

4 Education and training providers (including third level providers) need to be supported to engage, apply and embed the peace building principles in their work. The North/South Education & Training Standards for Youth Work Committee (NSETS) could provide an important vehicle for developing the skills of youth workers to undertake this work.

- 5** All peace building work in rural communities should adopt the approach of the Rural Enabler Programme outlined in the Introduction paper.



The Youth Forum Participation Project sought to increase and enhance its membership with a particular focus on increasing the participation of young people from rural areas. The role of the Forum is to encourage the participation of young people in a leadership role in the local authority. The project involved supporting members to organise and host information and recruitment events.

This involved a number of planning sessions and detailed consideration of the need for inclusiveness within the Forum (taking account of geography, gender, creed and affiliation to particular institutions including GAA, Bands and the Orange Order). A total of 29 young people joined the Forum as a result of these activities.

Learning: The importance of open, safe space and neutral venues for meetings, respect for difference and the need to actively seek to include individuals from all sides of the community as well as from ethnic minority communities.

Lessons for Practical Interventions with Rural Communities

- Involving young people in a process which appeals to them and which delivers learning through a creative process is successful
- Physical activities which promote a common or team bond can be instrumental in beginning to build bonds and friendship as the first step to understanding
- Young people at risk may also be vulnerable to engagement in sectarian and racist attitudes and behaviours - projects such as these can promote their inclusion within their own communities
- Groups and individuals involved in peace building work in rural areas need to develop their skills in specialist peace building training to engage with young people on hard to discuss issues
- Organisations involved in peace building work in rural areas need to support young people to take on leadership roles and to develop their own interventions and solutions for local peace related issues
- Organisations need to recognise the fact that peace building work with young people is a long term activity and requires ongoing input from a range of groups and organisations
- Building trust and rapport with young people is the key to meaningful engagement and, ultimately, successful peace building work
- Facilitating peace building work at a local level requires the organisations and individuals involved and leading the process to have a good level of awareness and understanding of the local environment and local sensitivities



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