

# Building Peace – The Role of a Service Centre Hub



Rural Community Network  
SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES

As rural communities continue to experience the withdrawal of key services from their areas, the role of a Service Centre Hub, which can not only halt this process but also and much more importantly, redress the service deficit, becomes all the more critical. However as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland, access to community facilities across rural areas has influenced personal and community choices in terms of where we live and work, where we are educated, what sports and recreation we get involved in, where we worship, where and with whom we do business as well as our choice in entertainment.

Rural communities, therefore, in many ways are just as segregated as urban where the minority becomes invisible except that the majority know who they are, where they live and work, worship, socialise and recreate. How can such communities engage in a peace-building programme when it appears that there is no-one on the other side to engage with? However history has demonstrated that communities are capable of finding people on the other side to talk/shout at, intimidate, injure and kill?

This impact of the conflict has developed a high capacity among rural dwellers to live apart as well as coping mechanisms that have contributed to community segregation, separation, sectarianism, social exclusion and inequality. Rural Community Network believes that this cannot be and indeed is not sustainable in the long term. The days of 'we need two of everything' must be a thing of the past if we are to build a rural community that is shared, cohesive, vibrant, inclusive as well as peaceful rural communities. We need to reflect on how scarce resources can be shared for the benefit of all the community. This fact sheet seeks to explore how this can be achieved through a very basic examination of our community development practice and offers solutions to issues that may arise.

It must be stressed that the list outlined below is not exhaustive and a community organisation should only use these as part of a wider discussion. Issues not identified below but seen as important for developing a fully inclusive Service Centre Hub can be added following appropriate discussion.

| Area to be examined                   | Why this area should be examined                                                                                                                                                                                  | Possible Solutions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| Community Group/<br>Organisation Area | <p>Within a constitution the area of benefit will be detailed.</p> <p>Does this reflect the true area of benefit?</p> <p>If not, why is the area identified?</p> <p>What is the group going to do about this?</p> | <p>Ask the committee members to list the townlands that make up the area of benefit.</p> <p>Discuss if this is appropriate as most rural areas have definite townland boundaries.</p> <p>If some townlands are left out, ask why and who lives in them.</p> <p>Do those that are excluded differ from the majority of the community living in the area of benefit?</p> <p>Is this exclusion by accident or design? If by design, group needs to ask why this is so.</p> <p>Group needs to examine commitment to full social inclusion.</p> <p>Boundaries for area of benefit need to be redrawn and action taken to engage with members of that community.</p> |

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| Area to be examined                   | Why this area should be examined                                                                         | Possible Solutions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| Community Group/<br>Organisation Name | After examination of area of benefit, the current community organisation name may no longer be relevant. | <p>If a community organisation's name currently reflects the area and community of benefit, then no change is necessary.</p> <p>If change is necessary, the organisation needs to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting to propose change of name. Community needs to be informed of the reasons for name change.</p> |

| Area to be examined                        | Why this area should be examined                                                                                                       | Possible Solutions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Community Group/<br>Organisation Committee | A community organisation's committee should reflect the make up of the wider community in order to be representative of the community. | <p>A committee needs to audit the make up of the community. As rural areas have changed substantially during the past few years and will continue to change, this audit needs to be updated on a regular basis. Organisations should use the Section 75 categories as a basis for such checking.</p> <p>If a community organisation is representative, it will not need to change although there will be a constant need to check that representation is still valid.</p> <p>If organisations are not representative, they then need to ask the following questions:</p> <p>Why are people within our community not represented?</p> <p>Is this absence by accident or by design?</p> <p>How do we engage with those not represented to ensure that their voice is heard at the committee table?</p> |

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| Area to be examined                    | Why this area should be examined                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Possible Solutions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Community Group/<br>Organisation Venue | The venue, whilst seemingly acceptable to the majority of the community, may be a barrier to accessing essential services by the minority population as a result of the conflict. If developed as a Service Centre Hub to be open and accessible to all, the group must be aware of any barrier to its accessibility. | <p>Organisations should complete an audit of the emblems and symbols which are displayed at the venue, both interior and exterior.</p> <p>Group should conduct an audit of the activities and events that have happened inside or outside the venue.</p> <p>As a result, the group should discuss what impact these emblems, symbols, activities and events may have on allowing all the community to access the venue.</p> |

| Area to be examined                | Why this area should be examined                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Possible Solutions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
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| Being a member of the 'other side' | <p>If the group recognises that the minority community may be apprehensive about accessing the Service Centre Hub, it would be essential to identify why this is. The following questions are set as an aid to moving forward group discussion.</p> <p>Does the group really know what it feels like to be a member of the 'other side'?</p> <p>Why should the group want to know what it feels like to be a member of the 'other side'?</p> <p>What is stopping the group from finding out what it feels like?</p> <p>Is the group willing to learn by asking, listening, experiencing and responding in a genuine fashion?</p> | <p>Try to role play initially to develop a sense of what this might be like (advocate for one issue important to the 'other side')</p> <p>Take advice and training before commencing engagement with the minority community.</p> <p>If appropriate, use skilled community facilitators to support this work.</p> <p>Talk to members of the minority community in their own space (move out of your comfort zone).</p> <p>Check your perceptions of the minority against how they actually feel.</p> <p>Be prepared to be challenged by the minority community about their perceptions of the group and the Service Centre Hub.</p> <p>Ask how the group and the Service Centre Hub could be more accessible to the minority community.</p> <p>Develop an action plan for the Service Centre Hub with assistance from the minority community to enhance inclusion, accessibility and acceptability.</p> <p>Reflect on the success of the action plan and make changes as appropriate with the assistance of the minority community.</p> <p>Make the accessibility of the Service Centre Hub a full community partnership.</p> |

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It must be acknowledged that the creation of a Service Centre Hub is only a small part in the development of a more peaceful and inclusive community. The work to develop this fully shared community space, whilst classified by many as 'soft, warm and fuzzy stuff', can at best be difficult and at worst, very painful - so much so that common sense would tell groups and communities to have nothing to do with it.

As a consequence of the conflict, resentment, hatred and mistrust is embedded deeply within rural communities. The subsequent journey to sustainable peace and a Shared Future will be long and uncomfortable. It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that as community groups examine this inclusive service provision within their areas, they are supported in this work through Service Centre Hubs and various community initiatives. This should be underpinned by a commitment to the long process of community rediscovery and regeneration.

As community relations work is embedded in our community development practice, the challenge to Rural Community Network is to facilitate this process through the availability of a dedicated development support team which local community groups can easily avail of and access.