

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Continuing Trauma of *The Troubles* – New Study Confirms Profound Impacts in West Belfast

Belfast, Wednesday 5 September 2007, in addressing an increasingly acknowledged impact of *The Troubles* and the wider delivery of the peace dividend, an assessment is published today of mental health and other key needs in one of the most deprived and conflict-affected areas in Northern Ireland. Based on extensive research with residents and local organisations in Whiterock, the assessment identifies exactly where and how the community has progressed over the past ten years. In considering challenges both past and present, the study is distinctive by linking mental health closely with post-conflict development, and advocates this broader understanding when designing strategies for long-term recovery. Completed on behalf of Corpus Christi Services and funded by the Community Relations Council NI, the study has been conducted by Dr David Connolly from the internationally-renowned Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) at the University of York.

The assessment concludes that Whiterock has reached a critical stage in its development. On the one hand, those interviewed agree that there have been slow though important positive changes in the wake of the peace process, noting some improvements in health services, housing and schooling. Nevertheless, the findings also support the government's statistics that Whiterock remains severely deprived, with particular deficits in employment opportunities, mobility, and skills training. Moreover, many residents and local respondents highlight how day-to-day life has deteriorated since the ceasefires and *The Agreement*. Half of the households surveyed point to a "dismantling of the community" through a discernible weakening in social relations, and two-thirds claim a range of stress-related needs because of where they live. With overwhelming evidence for specific mental ill-health, the report goes on to examine the variable types and manifestations of trauma. While intergenerational deprivation and *The Troubles* form the two root causes, three other recurring factors are the recent feud-based violence in the area, a widespread fear of crime, and the acute social changes post-conflict. Consequently, mental health problems and needs are not restricted to the individual but also reside at the family and community levels. In recognising the significant achievements of residents and local organisations coupled with the complex challenges that remain, the report closes with a set of 10 recommendations that emphasise and outline a more integrated and coordinated response among service providers in tandem with closer professional relationships with the relevant statutory agencies and elected representatives.

Background and Contact Information

Dr David Connolly is currently a researcher at the PRDU in York and a graduate of Queen's University Belfast. Since 2000, he has conducted several internationally-commissioned studies in post-conflict contexts, with concentrated field experience in Afghanistan, Indonesia and Northern Ireland. The PRDU has been at the forefront of post-war reconstruction and development for 15 years. Alongside postgraduate teaching and professional training, the Unit has completed numerous commissioned projects in over 20 war-torn countries and provided strategic guidance to several governments and United Nations agencies, the World Bank, and a diverse range of international and grassroots organisations.

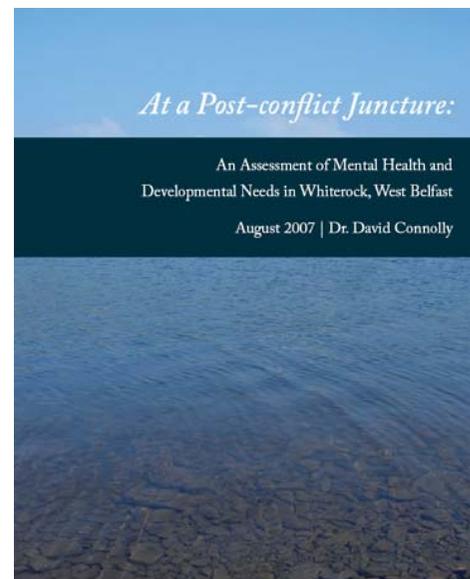
Corpus Christi Services has been addressing the effects of *The Troubles* in Whiterock and beyond through a range of programmes for almost 20 years. Working with residents and other organisations, current services centre on mental health, welfare advice, care of the elderly and housebound, and training and work placements for young unemployed.

To contact the author of the report and attain further information, please visit:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/poli/prdu/>

Copies of the final report can be ordered from or downloaded free of charge at:

<http://www.corpuschristiservices.co.uk/>



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