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PEACEBUILDING THROUGH THE RE-INTERGRATION OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED EX-PRISONERS

A recent evaluation of NIVT funding for ex-prisoner projects has shown that they have more than met the objectives of the EU PEACE Programme. The study concludes that the most important single benefit has been the impact on peace building with there having been significant achievements in fostering a spirit of self-help among ex-prisoners, in developing contacts and alliances between ex-prisoners of varying traditions, in helping to create a climate within which local economic development might happen and in general, helping to re-integrate ex-prisoners and their families into the wider society.

This *In Brief* draws on an independent evaluation of NIVT funded politically motivated ex-prisoner projects conducted by Mentor Economic Developments Limited. It sets out the context within which the projects were established, reflects on challenges groups faced and their development, and highlights the impacts. Conclusions are drawn in relation to obstacles and opportunities and recommendations made for NIVT, ex-prisoner groups, and Government and its agencies.

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Evaluation of the work of politically motivated ex-prisoner self-help projects

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Background

The NIVT programme was funded by the European Union's Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation. £5,120,441 was awarded to 61 groups between 1995 and 1999.

Funding was allocated directly to groups of ex-prisoners from specific traditions; to organisations which worked with ex-prisoners or which are non-aligned; and to other locally based and regional support organisations working with ex-prisoners.

The evaluation drew conclusions on the impact of the programme from analysis of all project files, a questionnaire survey circulated to all funded groups, interviews with a sample of 20 groups involving paid staff, committee members and volunteers, and interviews with stakeholders and policy influencers. Interim findings were considered at a consultation workshop attended by a range of groups and other interested parties.

The Formation of Support Groups For Ex-Prisoners

Any consideration of the work of ex-prisoners needs to start with two basic questions - why were ex-prisoner groups formed and what are they hoping to achieve?

The reasons for the formation of ex-prisoner groups are quite well documented elsewhere, particularly in reports produced by the ex-prisoners themselves. A summary of the reasons for their formation is:

- Politically motivated ex-prisoners did not want to "fit" into existing ex-prisoner/ex-offender services;
- Deep suspicions existed (and to some extent continue to exist) about the integrity of some Public bodies;
- It was perceived that there was to some extent a mismatch between the specific needs of ex-prisoners and the services offered by public bodies;
- It was believed that some staff in some public agencies found it difficult to empathise with ex-prisoners;
- The ex-prisoner groups had a very strong focus on self-help;
- Ex-prisoner groups wanted to be community based;
- The establishment of ex-prisoner groups was a fairly natural development or expansion of a "community of shared experiences";
- In many cases ex-prisoner groups were established because the ex-prisoners had developed strong leadership skills and wanted to use those skills for the benefit of their communities.

What are ex-prisoner groups hoping to achieve? The answers to this question at one level are almost as varied as the groups themselves. Some wanted to provide welfare support, others help with housing, some wanted to provide counselling while others wanted to help provide employment. However, the over-arching aim of the ex-prisoner groups is to facilitate the re-integration of politically motivated ex-prisoners. This was a particularly pressing issue given the early release of large numbers of politically motivated ex-prisoners under the terms of the Belfast Agreement.

Challenges

An analysis of the research reveals that ex-prisoner groups had to deal with a considerable number of challenges. The survey revealed that many of the groups have been in existence for a relatively short period - 4 or 5 years. There is therefore not a long track record on which to base judgements. At the same time there needs to be recognition of the starting point for many groups, particularly on the loyalist side. Traditionally, community development has been much weaker in loyalist areas than in republican areas. Few loyalist ex-prisoners have had a history of community development initiatives, and with the exception of the Shankill there would have been little evidence of community development initiatives in the areas from which they came. When loyalist ex-prisoners, therefore, began to attempt a process of self-help they were ploughing a furrow that had generally never been ploughed before. Because of this scenario the groups often had to face apathy, perhaps even hostility.

For many ex-prisoner groups the first challenge was to draw together groups of those who had experienced imprisonment, and to help those ex-prisoners articulate their needs. Many were reluctant to do so to any great level of honesty, primarily because of embarrassment in admitting weaknesses or challenges to their peers. It was difficult therefore to draw up accurate assessments of need and this in turn created its own difficulties when groups went to seek funding for programmes of work.

The second challenge was to think through a possible response to the needs that were identified. Groups had little experience in planning or in thinking strategically and there was an initial tendency to develop social services such as drop-in centres, welfare rights, advice and so on.

Given that these were, in the main, the most pressing issues which ex-prisoners faced these responses were understandable.

It would seem, however, that some groups tried to take on too much and there was little correlation between the capacity of the groups and their aspirations. Some groups tried to be all things to all people and a clearer degree of focus might well have resulted in a better quality of service provision in the longer term. Very few groups had structured development plans and this is still the case in a considerable number of groups. Gradually, however, as they became established and as word began to filter through of what other groups were doing the responses of the ex-prisoner groups became

more cohesive. This was considerably influenced by the emergence of the various umbrella organisations, especially on the Republican side.

Finding resources was problematic. None of the ex-prisoners themselves had any money and the communities in which they were based were almost universally disadvantaged. Had it not been for the Peace Programme, few of the groups would have been able to access resources such as premises and staff. However, finding staff was only the first problem. Given their commitment to self-help ex-prisoner groups generally insisted on employing ex-prisoners. This naturally limited the range of applicants and often those who applied had little or no experience or qualifications. It would be easy to be critical of this approach and to suggest that a wiser use of resources might have been to widen the recruitment net but this would be to deny the particular needs of ex-prisoners to meet with staff who could relate personally to their circumstances. This approach meant that virtually all staff had to learn very quickly and had to be trained literally "on the hoof". Staff had a steep learning curve in learning the system quickly. They faced challenges in identifying external contacts and resources and then in developing both credibility and a working relationship with those contacts. At the same time many staff were having to come to terms with their own personal challenges as they coped with their own release whilst also trying to provide services to other ex-prisoners.

Acquiring resources was one thing, managing them was another. Few groups had any real experience of managing projects or of managing staff. These challenges are widespread in the "normal" community development context but are enhanced in the ex-prisoner group context. Committees had to learn to manage and supervise staff and to ensure the best use of other resources. In a few instances the emergence of paid staff meant that volunteers in these groups declined rapidly as the volunteers perceived they were no longer needed.

There are few examples of groups thinking through how the resources they had acquired through grant aid might be sustained beyond the period of grant. This may not be a reasonable expectation given the relatively short timescale and the low starting base. Many groups were so focused on meeting needs and on survival that consideration of longer-term sustainability was virtually impossible.

Whilst at the same time as they were trying to develop services and manage projects and resources, groups



were also dealing with a number of other issues. In some communities, especially on the loyalist side, there was continued tension between rival groupings of paramilitaries. The groups generally had to cope with instances of discrimination and with a lack of understanding and hostility from some quarters.

Current Status

Despite the challenges and difficulties outlined above some groups have become very large and quite professional in their approaches. There is however a reliance on short-term funding and there is the threat that those staff who gain experience will move on into other work. Many members of the public have little sympathy with the ex-prisoner groups and consider far too much funding has been given to them already. This is not helped by somewhat imbalanced media comment at certain times. As has been said, Government has displayed little interest in supporting the groups - throughout the recent Programme for Government there is not a single mention of the need to help re-integrate politically motivated ex-prisoners.

The groups however have displayed very many strengths. In some cases the fact that they have survived at all is testament to those strengths. There is little doubt that a huge amount of commitment to the groups has been made by management committees, staff and volunteers and family members. Virtually all groups have active management committees and considerable numbers of volunteers working quite long hours. What is particularly noticeable is the high level of user involvement. As a rule groups do nothing without consulting and involving the ex-prisoners with whom they work. This is largely possible because of the close networks and contacts but is nevertheless very impressive.

All of those involved have acquired varying degrees of skills and these include:

- Fundraising;
- Research;
- Project management;
- Staff management;
- Committee skills;
- Negotiating skills;
- Communication skills;
- Networking skills;
- Planning skills;
- Financial management skills;
- Lobbying skills;
- Advocacy skills.

Groups have displayed considerable levels of flexibility and responsiveness and these have been made possible by the community access the groups generally enjoy. This access and the linkages it facilitates have led to quite high levels of participation. There are undoubtedly ex-prisoners who chose not to use the services of groups but our perception is that a very high percentage of ex-prisoners access the services offered.

At the same time some groups have displayed high levels of innovation and what has been very striking has been the ability of groups from all traditions to build alliances and partnerships across the divide. Groups have in this way been prepared to take risks, perhaps more so than other sections of the wider community for here we have sworn enemies recognising that they share common problems and being prepared to come together to address those problems. There is little doubt that the vast majority of ex-prisoner groups are solidly committed to the overall peace process and have in fact been major contributors to its development and maintenance.

Impact

The Programme has had impacts which are both quantifiable and intangible. The most important single benefit of the programme has been the impact it has had on peace building. Peace building has involved building confidence within communities as well as developing contacts between what had been warring combatants, fostering those contacts so that collaborative working can be initiated, and identifying ways in which the issues facing ex-prisoners and their families can be addressed. All of this has led to many ex-prisoners and their families feeling much less alienated and seeing that they have a place in this society.

Impact on ex-prisoners themselves

Ex-prisoner groups have helped many of their clients to:

• Find employment

There are numerous examples of assistance with interviews, work shadowing programmes, work placements, vocational training. There have also been more limited efforts to help some ex-prisoners pursue self-employment. Assistance was also given to help some people acquire HGV licenses and PSV licenses. Finally, of course, there are the jobs for ex-prisoners created directly within the ex-prisoner groups;

• Become involved in their communities

There are numerous examples of ex-prisoners working in their communities on projects which are not all related to the ex-prisoner groups. Some have established area-based partnerships, others have helped produce local community development plans, others engage in work with young people. This has entailed acquiring and building the skills involved in establishing new community groups, in planning projects and programmes and in the delivery of services;

• Develop their own personal skills, abilities and attitudes

This covers a wide variety of activities including the Irish language, arts and culture, leisure facilities and drop-in facilities as well as programmes in assertiveness and confidence-building. Ex-prisoners have been advised on areas such as welfare rights, benefits, housing, personal relationships, dealing with dependencies. Counselling services have been made fairly widely available. Many ex-prisoners have had the opportunity to become involved in strategic planning and many have had the opportunity to reflect on their history of radical political involvement and how this can be adapted to the new political environment.

Impact on the families of ex-prisoners

This has included:

• Assistance with personal relationships

Advice on how to cope with the released prisoner, advice on working with children and other extended family members. All of this has helped ex-prisoners to re-settle into their family relationships or where necessary to re-build those relationships. There are many anecdotes of how support from the ex-prisoner groups helped to maintain a marriage relationship or to restore parent child relationships;

• Financial help

Advice on budgeting and ensuring that all relevant benefits and other sources of income are secured. This assisted ex-prisoners and their families to survive financially;

• Provision of childcare facilities

This is not widespread but has been of critical importance in some instances, especially when wives/partners have been visiting prisons.

Impact on local communities

Ex-prisoner groups have:

- **Contributed to building community infrastructure**

This has included the establishment of some new groups; the provision of support to other groups engaged in regeneration, social inclusion, poverty; and the creation of some local networks;

- **Engaged in preventative work**

For example work with young people to prevent them being involved in paramilitary or anti-social behaviour and also encouraging these young people to have positive images of themselves and of their cultures. This work has resulted in reduced levels of anti-social behaviour and vandalism and increased morale and self-esteem in some young people;

- **Reduced tension**

The development of cross-community contacts contributed to reducing inter-community tensions at times of particular stress.

Impact on wider community

Wider impact has included:

- **Embedding peace**

Groups have contributed on an ongoing basis to the development and maintenance of the Peace Process. This applies to ex-prisoners from all traditions. It is difficult to envisage how the Peace Process would have been sustained had it not been for the positive influence exerted by many ex-prisoners and their families;

- **Reducing violence**

Groups have contributed to the overall reduction in the level of violence through involvement in community based preventative schemes and in work with both marginalised young people and in interface areas. It is not possible to quantify the numbers of lives saved or injuries avoided as a direct consequence of the influence of the ex-prisoners;

- **Raising awareness**

Groups have raised awareness generally of the needs of ex-prisoners and of the contribution they can make to creating a peaceful and stable community;

- **Challenging policy and practice**

Groups have challenged some public bodies to consider some of their policies and practices or to champion the rights of ex-prisoners;

- **Changed attitudes**

Groups have been successful in changing attitudes among some employers.

Impact on groups themselves

The impact on the groups themselves has been:

- **Building social capital**

The creation of new local structures which have the potential to make a contribution beyond the confines of work with ex-prisoners; the development of linkages both with other ex-prisoner groups and some victims groups. This resulted in a motivation to do more for their communities and to focus on aspects of peacebuilding;

- **Building human capital**

The acquisition of new skills and knowledge;

- **Building physical capital**

The acquisition of assets including buildings and equipment;

Conclusions

NIVT can justifiably claim that its funding under the Peace Programme has:

- Supported the healing process, which is particularly essential within combatants who had been engaged in violence, as part of the overall peace process;
- Secured a wide level of community involvement, both in the establishment of ex-prisoner groups and in the ongoing contacts which those groups have with the wider community;
- Provided significant levels of training and re-training to many ex-prisoners, therefore enhancing the skills base of ex-prisoners and the communities within which they operate;
- Clearly involved user groups in the design and implementation of projects in keeping with best practice in community development.;
- Encouraged self-help and user involvement in the provision of services.

The original objectives of the programme as stated have been met but more than that:

- There now exists a comprehensive support structure for ex-prisoners and their families; that structure is led by ex-prisoners and so is a clear model of self-help in practice;
- Linkages have been initiated and developed across the divides;
- Some innovative approaches by ex-prisoners and the awareness of their potential contribution for good in society have been significantly highlighted;
- Networks and alliances with some statutory bodies have been formed.

NIVT's actions and decisions have not always been universally welcomed and it has regularly had to defend its funding allocation for ex-prisoners both to the media and certain politicians. It is perhaps unfortunate that the positive impacts which have resulted as a consequence of NIVT's funding has not been more generally recognised. Instead there has been a tendency for both the media and others who are critical of the work to seek out individual cases where difficulties have been experienced rather than looking at the area of work as a whole. The reality of the situation is that, if the Peace Programme had not decided to support ex-prisoners no one else would have done it and this society would have had to deal with a very significant number of prisoners and their families who felt increasingly marginalised.

This society can choose to see politically motivated ex-prisoners as people who have been largely responsible for the troubles and are therefore not worthy of any support. They can ignore them in the (vain) hope they will disappear. Alternatively, Northern Ireland can grasp the opportunity to contribute towards peace and reconciliation throughout the community by ensuring that ex-prisoners have a level playing field and have the opportunity therefore to play a positive role in the new society being developed here.

This latter view will undoubtedly require a major leap of faith by some people but the alternative is unthinkable. What society wants to see a permanent and sizeable minority of some 100,000 ex-prisoners and their families who feel marginalised?

There is, of course, a reciprocal responsibility on the ex-prisoners to play their part in building public confidence in their motives and actions.

There is little doubt that huge energy and commitment have been invested by the ex-prisoner groups in helping their members. Many groups have reached very considerable levels of professionalism and there has been quite an array of innovative approaches to supporting ex-prisoners. On the other hand there are some groups which appear to be struggling and which have not moved much beyond the drop-in type of approach which while helpful is unlikely to make a significant long-term impact on the lives of ex-prisoners.

A further issue is the absence of a complete baseline study of the ex-prisoners and their needs.



Many groups have carried out their own local studies but these differ in scope and scale and content. Little attempt seems to have been made to pull all these various studies together and present a more comprehensive picture of ex-prisoners and their needs. If the numbers and needs of ex-prisoners have not been properly documented and presented it is increasingly difficult to make a case for addressing those needs, especially when there is also an inadequate record of impact.

A number of the ex-prisoner groups have been actively considering their future but too many are focused on the availability of grant aid and see their survival and growth as fully dependent on continuing grant aid. The delays which have occurred in implementing Peace II have therefore been quite catastrophic for many groups. Funding to support many workers has ended and the gap funding arrangements put in place by Government have been late in the day. Many workers have been terminated and there is a deep sense of pessimism and a fear that the momentum of the work has been lost. There is an urgent need for ex-prisoner groups to consider their future development.

Not enough debate has taken place around the practical implications for the groups if they were to be even partially successful in achieving re-integration for their members.

A few groups have ideas which are way beyond their potential and there is a danger that scarce resources could be dissipated in pursuing the unattainable. It is clear that the prime focus of the work of the groups has been on the "softer" issues such as advice and information, welfare rights, counselling and so on. Some efforts have been made to address job creation and economic issues but these have tended to happen in ad hoc way. Groups act pretty much on an autonomous basis and if one group develop what they think is a good idea they can pursue it without much recourse to other groups. Umbrella groups have however emerged more recently and are undoubtedly helping groups to think and act more collaboratively.

This is particularly true for self-employment and social economy initiatives. Too many of these appear to have concentrated purely on meeting local needs. There are some examples, but they are few and far between, of ex-prisoners who have successfully set up small businesses to the point where they are employing others. However, becoming self-employed or setting up a business

are daunting tasks for anyone and ex-prisoners face specific issues in this regard.

Some steps have been taken, primarily with the support of LEDU, to help address these needs but there has been only limited success. A suggested reason for this has been that self-employment initiatives in particular have targeted a relatively tight geographical area and the reality is that there are just not enough ex-prisoners within that area who have the motivation, capacity and ability to consider self-employment. There needs to be a critical mass of like-minded people who can stimulate and support each other in any self-employment initiative.

Similarly, many social economy projects target a low skill base and try to meet very local needs thereby depending on a very small market. Whilst these approaches have merit, a new approach is needed if sustainable social economy projects are to be developed.

Barriers to some ex-prisoners gaining suitable employment still exist around accessing HGV and PSV licences.

Moving to a different topic, it appears that the housing needs of ex-prisoners have been largely met. Issues still persist around benefits and finance and around personal relationship matters such as lack of confidence and low self-esteem and around some dependencies.

There is some evidence to support claims of burn-out among some volunteers and staff engaged in the projects and of some experienced staff starting to move on to other things. There is no doubt that considerable stress and uncertainty is caused through the short-term nature of the funding packages on offer.

Again, there is some evidence that groups have begun to come together to share tasks but few real sustainable strategic alliances between groups.

Recommendations

The following recommendations made by the consultants conducting the study are based on a scenario where:

- The issues around existing arrangements for Government are resolved and the Executive, Assembly and cross-border bodies are confirmed in place and are seen to be working reasonably well by the majority of people here;
- A new policing service is established and has gained acceptance from the majority of people;
- The economies of both parts of the island have continued to grow and as a result some labour and skill shortages worsen;
- Tourism expands considerably in Northern Ireland also creating significant numbers of new jobs;
- There is a continued reduction in the level of violence;
- Ex-prisoners and their families find it increasingly easier to secure employment;
- There is acceptance of the Human Rights agenda.

If this scenario, or something close to it, emerges what are the implications for ex-prisoner groups? They face a number of options - continuing as they are, doing their best to meet the needs of their current clients; expanding the range of services they offer to better help their current clients; trying to offer their existing services to more ex-prisoners; or trying to add new services and offering those to totally new client groups.

It is of course conceivable that groups will choose to pursue more than one of these strategic options but the reality, if the scenario outlined above actually emerges, is that ex-prisoner groups will find it virtually impossible to continue doing what they are doing. If they wish to survive they will find themselves entering mergers or strategic alliances and developing new services and seeking to serve new client groups. In practical terms this could well mean greater concentration by groups on wider community development concerns. Such an approach may well be a sensible development for some groups at least but any move in this direction needs obviously to take account of existing players.

A further strategic option is to work towards mainstreaming some of the services currently being provided by the groups. In effect this may well mean groups working themselves out of a job but it need not necessarily mean the end of the

road for some groups. If groups are able and prepared to adopt a wider community development role, especially with an economic focus, there will be plenty of work for them to do in the short to medium term at least. Such a move requires careful planning, detailed consultation and careful consideration of all the implications in terms of abilities, resources and capacities.

Implications for NIVT

NIVT should continue to fund and support the work of politically motivated ex-prisoner groups if it secures re-appointment as an Intermediary Funding Body. No other agency in Northern Ireland has the capacity or experience to undertake this work. We recommend, however, that the vast majority of such support and funding should go to existing groups and that new groups should only be considered for support if they can conclusively demonstrate the need for their services and that such needs cannot be met through existing groups.

In considering applications for support from ex-prisoner groups we recommend that NIVT should ask for a development plan in support of the application. Such a plan should have an economic focus as well as a social focus and should contain clear targets for both social and economic activity together with timescales and proposals for future sustainability.

We recommend that NIVT should consider the provision of technical assistance to ex-prisoner groups to enable them prepare development plans. Our preference is for the design and delivery of a tailored development plan training programme which would be co-ordinated by NIVT and delivered by a team of external trainers and the most experienced of the ex-prisoner groups. Elements within the programme should include training and guidance on moving towards sustainability.

We also recommend that NIVT should offer, either directly or indirectly, support to ex-prisoner groups in the areas of book-keeping and administration and record keeping.

We recommend that NIVT should join with the ex-prisoner groups in lobbying for the establishment of the Task Force outlined in a recommendation below.

We recommend that NIVT should consider setting aside some funding to support the creation of more strategic and collaborative approaches to

some of the work of the groups. In an ideal world such approaches would be across the divides but it would probably be counter-productive to try to "force-feed" any collaboration. Certainly in the short term it would be unrealistic to expect large steps towards collaboration across the divides but we would certainly like to see the existing steps being strengthened. We would like to see NIVT having the capacity to support any such moves towards collaboration which might emerge during the lifetime of Peace II. In any event collaboration between groups of similar background should be encouraged particularly in actions which would specifically address the employment and training needs of ex-prisoners.

We would like to see the emergence of a more strategic approach to employment and training among ex-prisoner groups and recommend that NIVT invite applications from groups which can demonstrate such a strategic approach.

We recommend that NIVT should open discussions with other bodies with responsibility for creating employment opportunities and enhancing employability in order to develop a dedicated programme aimed at helping some ex-prisoners move into self-employment and/or social economy projects.

We recommend that NIVT should open discussions with ASPIRE, the micro-credit agency based in Belfast and ask it to administer a dedicated business start-up loan fund for ex-prisoners. NIVT should provide some of the capital for this fund and should pursue other agencies to contribute also. ASPIRE should set up a small committee to consider loan applications from ex-prisoners and this committee should include representatives of the ex-prisoners.

We recommend that NIVT should support the delivery of a programme of training on Social Auditing as quickly as possible to all ex-prisoner groups. It is essential that groups are able to define the impact of their activities and in our view social auditing would be a highly effective tool in this area.

Implications for Ex-prisoner Groups

We recommend that those ex-prisoner groups which have not yet done so commit themselves to immediately preparing three year development plans which will address the economic as well as the social needs of their members and which will

put particular emphasis on moving the group towards sustainability. Such plans should include careful analysis of the external environment in which the group expects to be working. Particular attention should be paid to how ex-prisoner groups complement the work of other advisory or community development organisations. Where significant expansion is planned there should be evidence of consultation with other key stakeholders.

We recommend that all ex-prisoner groups commit themselves immediately to installing and maintaining social auditing systems so that the future impact of their work can be more clearly and accurately measured.

We recommend that groups actively consider the steps which might be taken towards greater inter-group co-operation. In fact we consider there are grounds for some of the smaller groups to consider merging primarily to help them to offer even better services to their members. As already stated co-operation should be across the political divide especially in areas of unemployment.

The voluntary co-operation of any ex-prisoner groups would make a very strong and positive statement to employer organisations, would allow employers to show and to state that they are even handed in their dealings and would make it much easier for employers to consider the recruitment of ex-prisoners.

We recommend that ex-prisoner groups could, for example, design and implement a programme which would influence employers, both public and private in their attitudes to the employment of ex-prisoners. The programme could design and have implemented a number of "Bridge" programmes which would provide ex-prisoners with training in relevant skills and a guarantee of a job interview with prospective employers on successful completion of the training. The programme should be based on partnerships or alliances with external organisations which would ensure that assessment; basic skills; vocational skills; and employer placement were made available.

We recommend that ex-prisoner groups should urgently examine the Programme for Government and identify areas of potential opportunity. We recommend that ex-prisoner groups should familiarise themselves with the new round of EU programmes, Equal, Leader Plus, Interreg and Urban and identify areas of possible opportunity. Given that most of these programmes will require transnational partners we recommend that ex-

prisoner groups begin the search for potential partners as soon as possible.

We recommend that ex-prisoner groups proactively seek to expand linkages with the media. There are perhaps obvious security risks but the most effective way of influencing public opinion is to let the public see/ read / hear instances of the positive impact of the work of the groups.

We recommend that ex-prisoners explore the potential for bringing the lessons they have learnt in Northern Ireland about conflict resolution to other parts of the world which are emerging into a post conflict period.

We recommend that the ex-prisoner groups consider the production of a comprehensive audit of the needs of ex-prisoners; this could probably be achieved through the synthesis of research already completed by individual groups and augmented where necessary by further local research.

We recommend that ex-prisoner groups carry out a training needs analysis of the staff working within groups and on the basis of that analysis prepare a training programme to meet the identified needs.

Implications for Government and its Agencies

We recommend that Government establish a Task Force to examine in depth the issues surrounding the needs of ex-prisoners and their families and their reintegration into society. Such a Task Force could be led by the Junior Ministers in the office of the First & Deputy First Minister and should include representatives of the following:

- Relevant Government Departments such as Department of Learning and Employment, Department of Social Development;

- Relevant Government agencies such as T&EA, LEDU, NIHE, PBNI, CRC;
- Equality Commission and Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission;
- Employer bodies such as CBI, IOD, NICC and the adhoc grouping chaired by Sir George Quigley;
- Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU;
- NICDA, the Social Economy Agency;
- NIVT;
- Ex-prisoner groupings.

The Task Force could particularly consider:

- Recruitment and selection processes both within the public and private sectors as those processes impact on ex-prisoners and their families and the vetting process which takes place;
- Access to business finance and insurance for ex-prisoners and their families;
- The education and skill levels of ex-prisoners;
- The legislation which makes it almost impossible for ex-prisoners to access HGV and PSV Licences;
- The scope of Equality legislation to ensure that the basic human rights of ex-prisoners specially in relation to employment are protected;
- The opportunity to mount an information campaign aimed at increasing awareness particularly among the private sector but also in the public sector of the potential well of labour represented by ex-prisoners;
- The need to take action to change public attitudes to ex-prisoners.

We recommend that Government should urgently consider the establishment of a Review Body or such other appropriate mechanism which would establish a process whereby politically motivated offences could be expunged from a person's record subject to measures designed to protect public safety.

NIVT, The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, is committed to improving the quality of life through enabling communities to tackle social need and divisions through funding and supporting community-based action; raising funds from a wide range of donors who wish to support and be associated with this work; and drawing on collective experience, research, and evaluation, to influence policy development.

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