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When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?
– Eleanor Roosevelt

Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.
– Edmund Burke

You just need to be a flea against injustice. Enough committed fleas biting strategically can make even the biggest dog uncomfortable and transform even the biggest nation.
– Marian Wright Eldman

Introduction from the Commissioners



The Commission for Victims and Survivors was set up to help meet need.

In this, our first newsletter, need is our theme. The four of us (Patricia MacBride, Michael Nesbitt, Brendan McAllister and Bertha McDougall) – are determined to help meet need, and in doing so, make a positive difference to the day-to-day lives of victims and survivors.

We want to start removing the barriers that create difficulties in their lives; to advocate and lobby on their behalf; to make sure their

voices are heard by the people who make the decisions that affect their lives and to stand up and shout when their needs are being ignored. Already, in our first few months, we have met too many people who feel hurt and even traumatised by the way they have been treated after they became victims and survivors, to be in any doubt that we – as a society – can do better by them.

We see no need to send Christmas Cards this year, but we do see the need to keep you up to date with what we think will be important in 2009.

Please read on, for our thoughts on how to assess need, and then deliver on that assessment.

The Compelling Case for a Comprehensive Needs Assessment

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) is long overdue; without it, there can be no certainty that support and services match need. The Assessment is the responsibility of the Commission and we believe it is the foundation stone for building a solid structure to support victims and survivors.

As a starting point, we have commissioned research which will give us an initial view. We see no point in re-inventing the wheel and the Commission will acknowledge and value the work already carried out in this area, especially by voluntary and community groups.

We should have the results in January and look forward, not just to sharing the information with victims and survivors, and their groups, but also engaging with them in the Forum to develop the research into the Comprehensive Assessment, which itself will be a living document, continually amended and updated as we refine our knowledge and as needs

change.

"If we wait for the moment when everything, absolutely everything is ready, we shall never begin."

– Ivan Turgenev

Let us be clear about the impact of the assessment. Funding does not stop until it is complete; it simply becomes better and better focused when the CNA process has begun. It is our wish, our hope, and our determination to complete the CNA with the help of the Forum, which we intend to set up in 2009.

We believe the CNA should be a comprehensive document which identifies all the needs of victims and survivors. We intend, therefore, that the focus of the CNA is broad and includes assessment of needs in the following areas:

Individual

- Counselling
- Befriending

- Therapies
- Information
- Truth Recovery (personal)
- Financial
- Social Isolation
- Exclusion
- Recognition (storytelling)
- Public Acknowledgement
- Employment
- Education/training

- Benefits
- Health
- Mental Health and well-being

Community

- Building for the future
- Dealing with the past
- Legislation
- Education – broader community
- Business Links

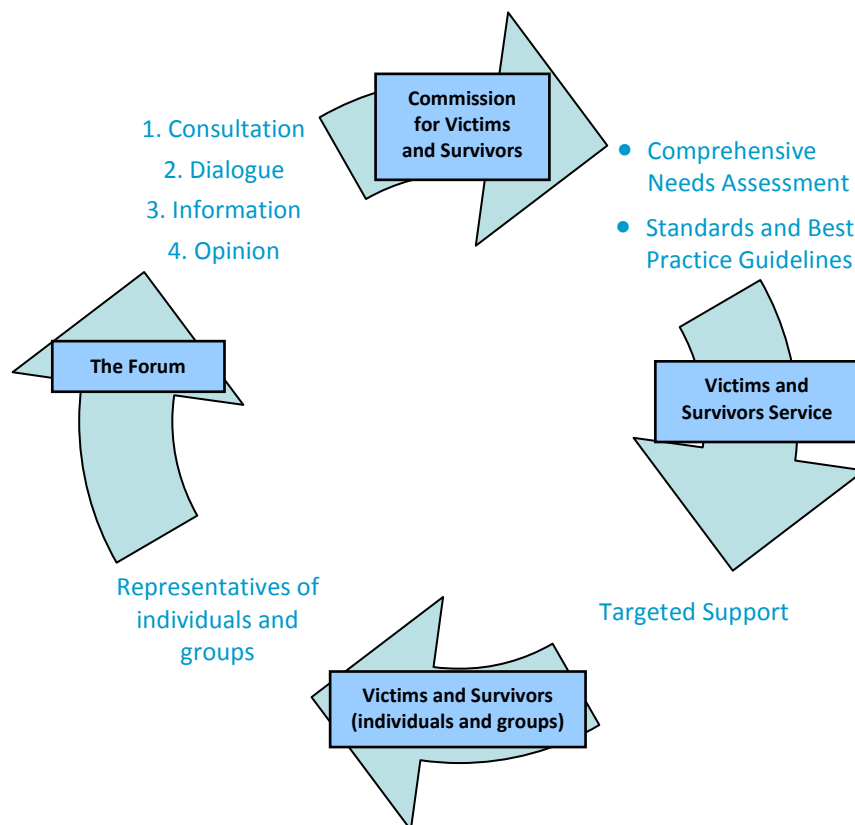
- Community Health
- Mental health and well-being

While it may be too late for individuals or groups to input into our Initial Review of Need, it will never be too late to contribute to the CNA, and you are very welcome to send us your thoughts on needs – our contact details are on the back page of this newsletter.

IT IS TIME TO STOP TRYING TO BUILD A BETTER PAST AND TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

- OMAGH MOTHER

Strategy Response



- The Commission will consult, and work in partnership with the Forum to compile and update the CNA

- The Commission will have oversight of the Victims and Survivors Service, holding it to account for the quality of its delivery.

For too long, individuals and groups have had to put up with avoidable uncertainty because of the short-term nature of government policy, and funding. Individuals wonder whether the same grants will be on offer again next year - and if so, will they still be eligible? Groups lose some of their most talented people, who fear that the funding will run out, and they have mortgages to pay, families to feed, children to educate. And who will risk sharing best practice, when you might turn a sister group into a rival, who will

We see 2009 as a big year for victims and survivors, when we will understand the needs of individuals like never before, and prepare to deliver services better than ever:

- The proposed new Service will allocate the budget, currently £36 million over the three years 2008-2011, to individual victims and survivors, and to groups
- Decisions about how the funding is allocated will be based upon the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA)
- The Commission will be responsible for compiling the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, and drawing conclusions and recommendations from it

compete with you for the next round of funding?

The Commission advocates a transition to longer-term funding arrangements, including appropriate support to assist governance, financial management and strategic planning.

"Inner healing begins when we give up the hope for a better yesterday and take the first step towards making a better tomorrow."

- A Mother's Reflection

The Forum



Commissioners Brendan McAllister and Bertha McDougall

Imagine a space where your voice is heard – in fact, not just heard, but listened to, and even acted upon.

That's the Commission's vision of a Forum for victims and survivors. Not a mere talking shop, where people can let off steam, only for their views to disappear into the atmosphere like vanishing vapour. No, we see a Forum where needs are assessed and met.

This Commission is totally committed to delivering the Forum – so much so, in fact, that we will do our best to anticipate and manage every risk before we even call a meeting. That's why we have a seven point plan for setting it up, with each stage processed in collaboration with you, the stakeholder.

Stage One involves an initial assessment, involving discussions with

relevant individuals, groups and agencies. An Assessment Report will be reviewed by the Commission in early February.

In the light of the Assessment Report, we intend to draw up a Design Plan by the end of March and to publish the plan in early April, with thoughts on issues such as structure; membership; rules and procedures; programme of work and location.

Any individual or group wishing to express views on the development of a forum is invited to get in touch with the Commission Office who will make appropriate arrangements.

The Service

The outline draft Strategy paper from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) proposes a new service as the vehicle for meeting the needs of victims and survivors. Whatever the new Service is to look like, we believe that the Service must have the following qualities:

- Adequate resources to meet demand
- The highest financial, ethical and service delivery standards
- The capability to understand the complex, sensitive and at times conflicting needs and aspirations of victims and survivors and those who deliver services to them
- A **"can-do" attitude** that is capable of being both proactive and reactive
- A broad vision that ensures duplication is minimised, service provision streamlined where possible and a cross-sectoral approach is promoted.

Commission Looks at Living History

In the last number of months, we have spoken to many people who have emphasised the value of telling their story, and having it listened to and acknowledged. We have also been fortunate to see a number of oral history projects that groups have undertaken, which highlight that along with the many existing sources of what happened, we need a central, public space where people can learn about the human impact of the conflict.

The announcement of Peace III funding under the Strand "acknowledging and dealing with the past" provides an opportunity to develop initiatives which will ensure individual stories are preserved as part of a rich educational resource, for use by primary and post primary schools, academics, and others seeking an understanding of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.

We have made an expression of interest to the Special EU Programmes Body to lead a consortium that will develop and

deliver a Living History archive, which would be both internet based and available at various sites. Our vision is not to become the sole collection body for these stories, but to develop standards and practices in their collection. We offer ourselves not as a rival or threat to any group wishing to do its own thing, but as a co-ordinating resource, and a point of contact for the many individuals who are not group members.

The expression of interest phase has closed, and we are awaiting information from the Special EU Programmes Body as to the next steps in the process, where we hope to be in a position to develop a consortium to take forward the project with your help.



Patricia MacBride

News of Move to Windsor House, Belfast



For now our contact details remain:

Commission for Victims and Survivors
Goodwood House
44-58 May Street
Belfast BT1 4NN

Tel: (028) 90 25 66 94
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Email: commission@cvsni.org

The Commission hopes to move in the early weeks of 2009 to its permanent home, in Windsor House, Bedford Street, Belfast.

You may have read speculation that the Commission would be based outside Belfast. In fairness, that was the first option we looked at, so you might like to know why it did not happen. These were the major factors:

- The day we were given our temporary home, we were told we needed to move – or be evicted, so we had to decide quickly!
- We needed to occupy a “neutral” space where victims and survivors could feel as comfortable as possible when visiting
- We wanted to be as accessible as possible by public transport
- We needed a building with suitable access for people with disabilities

We wanted to be close to the seats of influence and power, to carry the voices of victims and survivors to the desks of the those who make decisions

With all those criteria to meet, there weren't many contenders for our new workplace!

We will keep you informed of any changes in contact details after the big move.

Three rules of work:

Out of clutter find simplicity;

From discord find harmony;

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

- Albert Einstein

Let Us Know Your Story

One of the most important things this Commission can do is listen. So, please feel free to contact us. Below, you'll find just two of the hundreds of stories we've listened to already this year. For obvious reasons, we have taken steps to protect the identity of individuals, but the spirit of the stories remains true:



My Story

The Troubles Are Over. Really? My father joined an organisation and got himself killed. So, it was just me, my brother and my mum. And she was brilliant – getting us up and washed and fed and off to school. She was there for us in the afternoon too - kissing our bruises and helping with homework.

But bro and I are grown up and mum is home alone, and just lately she looks old before her time. Because she hasn't got a reason for getting out of bed anymore – because we were that reason.

I feel guilty. What sort of life has mum had, and there's nothing I can do to pay her back. I spoke to my brother about it. He feels guilty too. But then we fell out. Because he blames dad, but as far as I'm concerned dad was a hero. We fell out, big time. And now my son wants to know why his uncle won't let him play with his cousin anymore. And they say the Troubles are over.

—Anon

I was doing really well with my new business – until the day I took the cash to the bank. The police say it was paramilitaries. All I know is that I felt the fear and the heat and the hurt.

They patched up the body, but the mind wasn't so good, and that's the worst bit, really – worse than the assault itself. Because I hated where they sent me for assessment. It was cold and clinical, and so, so very intimidating in that waiting room. And all I got felt like a mechanic having a look under the bonnet and telling me I needed to book in for a MOT – but then, the Receptionist says, there are no appointments for two months.

If I could talk to the Health Minister, I'd tell him it's not right. When people assault you, you expect the state to look after you, not beat up your dignity.

—Anon

“The question should be, is it worth trying to do, not can it be done.”

- Allard Lowenstein, twentieth-century American diplomat