

Project Origins

Cúnamh was established in 1997 as a community led mental health project. The organisation emerged from the opportunity created in 1994 as a result of the IRA ceasefire and subsequent political and social developments. This



created a new environment and space in which for the first time individuals could commence a process of reflection, exploration and community growth. These new

hidden opportunities allowed for new methods of personal and community development to take shape.

The rationale underpinning the development of the project was that the peace building process needed to cater for the emotional and psychological impact, which the conflict had upon people's health & well being. No such service provision existed within republican/nationalist communities as a result of the prevailing mistrust of the statutory sector.

Project Aims:

- To provide individuals with a safe place to explore and understand their feelings in relation to past traumatic experiences as they enter into the healing process
- To provide individuals with a supportive and friendly environment in which they can actively negotiate various routes for change on their personal development and the development of their communities
- To establish a durable community-led support system
- To document the process as a dynamic model of progressive community support for implementation elsewhere

Project Ethos

Cúnamh's work was piloted within the Bogside and Brandywell area of Derry, which is a nationalist/republican community. This community's experience of the conflict has been of acts and events caused, mainly by British State forces, including Loyalist forces. Moreover, Cúnamh firmly believes that the process of recovering from political conflict must initially take place within a safe and empathetic environment. Individuals and communities are entitled to support structures, which respect and understand their experiences.

Dominic Burke, Director of Social Care (WHSSB) in his response to John Parke's paper 'Living With The Trauma Of The Troubles', has shared this view

'It is clearly recognised that there are already community groups who are involved in very effective efforts to address the psychological damage caused by the conflict to individuals, groups and ultimately communities. It is also recognised that this type of work needs to take place at a community-based level, and on single identity terms initially, accepting the fact that people need the comfort and security of "their own" when beginning to share their story and the inherent hurt and pain. This enables the transition from Victim to Survivor'.

Group to explore Troubles link with illness

A NEW initiative designed to explore links between the Troubles and ill-health is to be launched in Derry today.

The Cúnamh project set up by the Bogside and Brandywell initiative, already offers support to victims of the 'Trouble' through 'Sunshine' and 'Serenity' projects.

The group will also examine the relationship between the effects of the

conflict and its health and social health.

Cúnamh co-ordinator Dominic Burke said the project's aim was to provide a supportive and safe environment for participants to explore and understand the impact which the conflict

has had upon their lives. The group, using this approach and concentrated on and has been deeply influenced by the effects of multi-agency and the loss of loved ones and employment.

Cúnamh is taking the initiative and beginning the process of making people proud to be participating with their past experiences.

Participants' event will take place at Bishop Street

community centre at 111, Bishop Street, Derry, on Tuesday, 19 and 20th.

Participants will discuss their own personal experiences, health issues and family history, trauma and health experiences.

There will be a group development of 10 participants, activities under the 'Sunshine' and 'Serenity' projects, a report on 1



Supportive Listening

Provides a safe, supportive space for sharing.

This supportive listening is bound by stringent codes of confidentiality. The service offers a safe place to explore any issues of concern in a friendly, caring, confidential setting.

This service also includes an e-mail listening facility.

Counselling

Cúnamh recognises the perceived stigma associated with counselling. For this reason we have throughout the past five years supported local people to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and training to provide this service.

There is no great mystery to counselling. It is a tool, which gives the client an opportunity to explore, discover, and clarify ways of living more satisfyingly and resourcefully. It is a form of helping that is focused on the needs and goals of the person, based upon the belief that each individual possesses the necessary resources within themselves to make meaningful change.

Cúnamh 's counselling service operates the following procedures:

- An initial assessment is conducted by a trained counsellor. This ensures that counselling is appropriate for the individual.
- An initial contract of six weekly sessions is offered. An evaluation is conducted after six weeks. This determines the effectiveness of the counselling process and also if there is a need for further sessions.
- All counsellors undertake regular supervision from an external qualified counselling supervisor.

Cúnamh is an organisational member of B.A.C.P., and adheres to their Ethical Codes of Practice. This ensures safety not only for the organisation but the individuals using the service.

Advocacy

Cúnamh offers practical and emotional support through our advocacy service.

This includes assistance with Northern Ireland Memorial Fund applications and liaison with relevant statutory agencies.



Relaxation/Stress Elimination

This holistic programme encourages users to learn methods of relaxation suitable to their make-up and lifestyle. The course comprises an exploration of individual needs, including diet, and an introduction to Yoga, Tai - Chi and Meditation. All programme elements are delivered by qualified practitioners.



- Programme Duration 8 weeks.

Personal Development & Confidence Building

This programme support participants to explore their strengths, abilities, skills, qualities, and design a plan for personal development. It also comprises assertiveness training through role-play.

- Programme duration 8 weeks.



Drop-In Relaxation Morning

Friday mornings in Cúnamh have been set aside as a Drop-In Relaxation morning. Between the hours of 11.00 - 1.00 holistic therapies, such as Reiki, Massage and Reflexology are offered to participants. If none of the above treatments appeal, there is always the option of just 'dropping-in' for a cup of tea and friendly chat.



Information Seminars

Cúnamh hosts a series of information seminars dealing with a range of topics. These include topics like, trauma, community healing, stress elimination, addictions, post traumatic stress disorder and healthy eating options. Locations are selected to reach a wider base within the community.

ESSENTIAL LIVING SKILLS

Basic Computer Skills:

Taking the fear out of using computers for the first time or beyond. Learn the basic skills of computing pitched at a level to suit your needs. Learn in a friendly relaxed atmosphere from a fully qualified IT instructor and get to grips with subjects such as,

- 'Switching it On'
- 'Send & Receive an Email'
- 'Using the Internet'
- 'Writing a Letter'

- Course duration 6 -8 weeks.

Anger Management:

Anger is the least understood emotion. When under pressure, people find their own emotions, especially anger to be the most worrying and damaging. In the long term, this can result in poorer health. Managing anger can liberate and reassure you in building healthy relationships. You will discover how to deal with your own anger, whilst being shown practical tools to help others manage theirs. How anger (yours or some-one else's) need not spoil your day.

- Course Duration 8 weeks

Basic Counselling Skills

Basic skills condensed and presented in jargon free language. Differences between Listening Ear and Counselling, Confidentiality explained. Looking at issues of personal and professional boundaries, how to address challenging behaviour in a safe manner. This course provides participants with a greater degree of self-awareness and equips them with healthy communication skills.

- Course Duration 8 weeks



Rationale

Genuine healing cannot occur without an acknowledgment of the event or action, which caused the wound. This allows the grieving process to begin and a personal and community healing to occur.

The discourse of recent years has sought to exclude an acknowledgment of many individuals' experiences of the conflict, especially those affected by the actions of the State and State sponsored forces.

Throughout the past five years Cúnamh has co-ordinated many initiatives aimed at collating past experiences, exploring the impact of these experiences, and transforming the knowledge gained into positive learning opportunities for the future.

DRAMA & ROLE PLAY

These have included:

- Drama
- Using structured role-play and drama past experiences, present situations and future fears or aspirations can be explored in a safe and neutral environment.

"Teacht Abhaile"

In 1999 work commenced on exploring the experience of imprisonment upon family life during the 1970s and 80s. This culminated in the production of the 'Teacht Abhaile' drama, which focused, not alone upon the reality of imprisonment for the prisoner but upon the impact and consequences for his family. The entire cast of fifteen, with the exception of one, were either political ex-prisoners or relatives. The play performed for capacity audiences during October and November 1999 and a final performance was staged in Long Kesh prison in April 2000.



The Remembering Quilt

Cúnamh has assisted bereaved families in the Derry & Strabane areas to contribute squares to the Relatives For Justice Remembering Quilt.

Relatives and friends depict their personal memories of a loved one on a square. The square is symbolic of that person's journey in life and serves as a constant memorial of



the tragic circumstances of their death. Anyone who has ever seen the Remembering Quilt cannot fail to be touched by this testimony to the lives of those now sadly gone.

Ordinary People - Extraordinary Lives

Na Cuimhneacháin (Memories)

This project documents the personal stories of 'normal' people's lives. They are extraordinary because of the 'abnormal' situations, in which they found themselves. All of the stories are hosted on the Cúnamh website.

Derry News 'Memories of the Troubles'

Since March 2003 local newspaper 'Derry News' has published an edited account of stories from the Na Cuimhneacháin project. This has enabled a broader community access to the project and has provided an opportunity for individuals who are not Cúnamh users to participate.

Annie's Bar 'The Forgotten Massacre'

On 20th December 1972 five men were murdered by



Loyalists as they sat watching a football match in Annie's Bar in the 'Top of the Hill' Gbolascale, Derry. This event, like so many others, was forgotten and the bereaved families were left to rear children and get on with life. No proper investigation was conducted to find those responsible. In August 2002 Cúnamh commenced work on a publication aimed at providing an account of this tragic event. This publication was launched on the 30th anniversary of this event. It outlines the events of that awful night, as remembered by the bereaved relatives and friends.



The Bloody Sunday Support Service was originally launched in 1997. Its main focus was to pilot a structure of support for the families of those killed and those wounded on Bloody Sunday.

Support was provided through support groups and relaxation events. For many, this was the first time they were able to explore the impact Bloody Sunday had on their lives. Volunteers noted symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, irrational behaviour, depression, anger and panic attacks, presenting in many of the service users.



On 29th January 1999 Tony Blair announced the establishment of a new inquiry. Cúnamh facilitated a process of consultation with

family members. This enabled us to assess and identify their needs for the duration of the Inquiry.

This process led to the formal establishment of a range of services. These included: Listening Ear, Counselling, Home Visit Service, Support Groups, Advocacy and Relaxation Therapies. A referral system was established with other relevant organisations. Members of the local community, who came forward to offer their help, delivered many of the services.

Cúnamh recognised the need for a Volunteer Support Service to cope with the needs of those attending the hearings at the Guildhall. After a rigorous selection process, a volunteer support service was introduced. All volunteers underwent training, specific to the needs of the work to be carried out.

Volunteers attended the inquiry in the Guildhall daily, offering listening ear support and counselling. They availed of daily supervision and frequent peer support with the volunteers meeting regularly to assess their own needs and how best to respond to the unique circumstances of the Inquiry. This was an ongoing process and resulted in consultations with family members through a series of residentials.

The first residential was organised by Cúnamh in October 1999. This provided the families with an opportunity to relax, and to share and explore their thoughts and feelings about the Inquiry. It also allowed Cúnamh the opportunity to de-mystify the counselling process and allay any fears about seeking support.

This residential provided Cúnamh with essential feedback, which effectively shaped the future services.

A further two residentials were hosted by Cúnamh as part of the on-going support throughout the period of the Inquiry.

When the Inquiry moved to London, Cúnamh gained support from the Inquiry to continue to ensure the availability of the counselling service. Since then counsellors have accompanied families to London and have provided a counselling service daily. An evening facility was also set up for those who wished to avail of it.



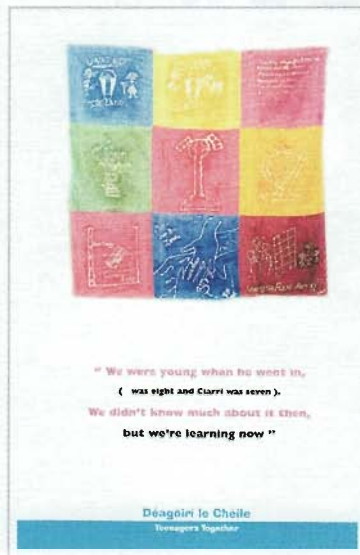
Project Origins

The Déagóirí le Cheile project stemmed from Cúnamh's responsibility for facilitating development processes on a holistic basis within the political ex-prisoner community in Derry.

As a natural extension of other ongoing work a consultation was launched in 1998 by representatives of Cúnamh, Tar Abhaile, Save the Children Fund, and Bogside and Brandywell Initiative into the effects of political conflict on young people. A strong consensus emerged in support of the need to establish a project, which would accommodate and support the needs of young republicans and nationalists during this phase of the peace process.

Cúnamh carried out extensive consultations with many families and in particular many children of ex-prisoners to gauge their perspective on the idea. There was an overwhelming response in support of the project being established.

Through the financial assistance of NIVT Déagóirí Le Chéile was established in 1999 as a pilot project, with participation from a group of young people from Derry City, who had experience of a parent imprisoned, and also young people from Letterkenny whose parents were forced into political exile.



From its outset Déagóirí Le Chéile has been informed by a series of aims designed to enable young republicans and nationalists to collectively share their experiences of the conflict and to explore methods to redress issues relevant to them; to develop a personal and community development programme designed to enhance their individual and collective growth; to train and support the young people to become peer support workers for other young people with similar experiences.

However, in keeping with the youth led ethos underpinning the project a research and consultation process was commissioned to develop a model of practice and a programme of activities based upon the young peoples' needs and ideas. This was completed in August 1999. The Project was evaluated in 2001 and a booklet outlining the project's journey was compiled by the participants.



This was launched in August 2001.

