**Summary Record**

**Together: Building a United Community**

**Engagement Forum**

**Tuesday 18nd Sept 2018**

On 18th Sept, The Executive Office (TEO) and over 150 community practitioners, policy makers and academics gathered in Lisburn Island Centre for the seventh meeting of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Engagement Forum. The event focused on the T:BUC theme Children and Young People and placed a strong emphasis on what central government and practitioners can do to develop and engage with young people and explore actions that could enable greater participation by young people in promoting good relations.

**Ms Killen** - Strategic Policy, Equality & Good Relations

Ms Killen welcomed delegates to the Engagement Forum. She highlighted Good Relations Week with 180 events taking place, a 10% increase in participation in the programme since 2017. Also highlighted was the production of the new Good Relations Week website. The theme of “Then, Now and Next” reflects on the work taking place now whilst looking ahead to the future and how we move forward. Ms Killen acknowledged the positive work that has been done to date. It is now five years since T:BUC launched and Ms Killen outlined the range of work and achievements made by the T:BUC programme. She also acknowledged the need to reflect on the wide range of work and its successes to ensure the programme continues to provide positive, meaningful opportunities to promote good relations.

Ms Killen outlined the role of the Racial Equality Strategy and the Vulnerable Person’s Relocation Scheme TEO have responsibility for and how it, combined with the work being delivered by T:BUC, is helping to promote diversity and good relations across the whole community. Ms Killen noted there have been huge positive changes made within the community but with still more to do. Intolerance still exists, along with political instability, making the work of delivering good relations difficult, but still as necessary now as ever.

The most recent activity and work being delivered is mentioned in the T:BUC newsletter.

Ms Killen outlined the recent youth focused event in March 2018 and how the young people involved, organised and ran the event. Ms Killen outlined the findings from the youth event and noted that we need to look at how to address the issues raised there. Ms Killen introduced the speakers for the day including two of the young people, Laura Stewart and James Treanor, who organised and ran the March youth programme and Dr Schubotz from Queen’s University, Belfast. Ms Killen outlined the agenda for the day and handed over to Dr Schubotz for his presentation.

**Dr Dirk Schubotz**

Dr Schubotz began by outlining the four main areas he would cover in his presentation. These being 16 year old young people’s participation in good relations projects and programmes, attitudes to minority ethnic communities, attitudes to good relations and respect.

Dr Schubotz provided background, outlining the Young Life and Times survey, its methodology and how he had been involved with it for 16 years.

Dr Schubotz presented the findings from ten years ago to compare with the most recent survey in 2017. Issues coming out of the 2007 Life and Times survey were more positive attitudes towards minority ethnic and good relations in general. He also suggested the data suggests young people were more favourable towards mixed housing, integrated schools and mixed work places at that time.

By comparison the most recent 2017 survey showed very little change statistically. In terms of attitudes, the majority of young people felt they had a more positive attitude to others after participating in good relations activity. However, a sizeable group also stated that participation in good relations activity did not change their attitudes either positively or negatively. This was approximately 1 in 5. Dr Schubotz pointed out there is a large group who participate in cross community schemes because they already have a positive attitude towards others. It is a very small proportion of participants that said their attitude became more negative or there was no change as a result of the Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) programme.

He pointed out that over the last 10 years there was a 13% increase of young people who now “very often socialised and played sport with people from a different religion” (Young Life Time 2017). Dr Schubotz further alluded to the evidence showing that there is a positive trend though it is a modest change. However Dr Schubotz did point out there was a small increase in the number of Protestants who now felt less positive towards Catholics after attending camps or other cross community programmes. Similarly, there was a decrease in the percentage of Catholics who were content with participating in mixed schools, after attending. Dr Schubotz also went on to say that all the other data clearly showed that camps and cross community programmes delivered to young people had a positive effects on how people feel towards each other.

Young people who attended camps and cross community programmes were more likely to have a positive attitude towards minority ethnic groups. He outlined there is an increase in numbers of people feeling more favourable towards minority ethnic groups and more so among Catholics than Protestant. Overall there was a modest increase in the number of young people who now socialise and play sports with people from a different ethnic background. However, Dr Schubotz pointed out that only 26% of young people felt that NI was a welcoming country for minority ethnic communities.

Looking at the theme of “Respect” Dr Schubotz compared the Young Life and Times with the Adult Life and Times. The data showed that older Protestants now feel more positive towards relations being better than 5 years ago. Overall there appears to be little change but adults are more positive than young people. However the overall trend is there is slightly less proportion of people who now felt positive about the future. Dr Schubotz pointed out that adults expressed a far greater positive attitude and optimism towards good relations in the future than young people and illustrated how political events have impacted on people’s attitude though time.

Over the years adults have expressed a greater desire for people to participate in mixed religion schools and work, more so than young people, he stressed that even though the statistics appear to be negative it should be noted, while young people may appear less willing to participate in mixed housing etc. there is still ¾ of young people respondents do want to participate in mixed society.

Dr Schubotz went on to explain there is now an identified change in young people’s identity. Within the Young Life and Times there has been a drop in British identity and increase in Northern Irish identity. The data suggests national identity is more important to Catholic young people than Protestants. Further he found that there was a higher proportion of people in Northern Ireland disagree that Northern Ireland is a place where people respect each other.

Dr Schubotz concluded by saying that the data from “Young Life and Times” provides inconclusive evidence on the impact of camps and cross community programmes though overall T:BUC events increase positive feelings people have towards each other. He acknowledged that there is still work to be done on the programmes, particularly as there is some evidence a number of them may be having a negative impact on some young people. His research showed that some small number of young people who, on joining the programmes having stated they were happy to engage with people from other backgrounds, responded after the camps, that they were now not happy to engage with people from other backgrounds.

The strongest evidence from the Young Life and Times was that positive attitudes have increased towards minority ethnic groups and there is a modest increase in contact, over the previous decade, despite only 1 in 5 young people feeling that NI is a place where people respect each other. Dr Schubotz, in conclusion stated that over time there have been only modest changes and for there to be success we must all keep working to improve the situation.

Ms Killen thanked Dr Schubotz for his detailed input and commented on the presentation and pondered whether young people’s views are shaped by the older people’s views. Looking at the results Ms Killen suggested that while there are negative views there is also a large group of positive comments, but the position could be better.

Next Ms Killen introduced the Youth Service “Young Leaders Programme” short film “Introducing T:BUC” produced by the Education Authority. (Available on the CRC website).

Following the video Ms Killen welcomed and introduced James Treanor & Sarah Stewart, who participated in the Youth Service Young Leader’s programme that organised and delivered the Young People’s T:BUC Engagement Forum in March 2018.

James and Sarah outlined the experience of organising a youth focused T:BUC event with a group of 20 young people from throughout NI. Part of the process included a young people’s survey on their attitudes towards respect and culture, the impact of social media and the approachability of the PSNI. The results enabled the group to develop a structured programme which was delivered to young people on the 13th March 2018 in Cookstown. James and Sarah said the event enabled them, along with the 200 participants, to explore issues around rights and equality as well has gaining a greater understanding of negative experiences that many of the young people endured. A range of methodologies was used at the event to enable the young people to express their opinions and experiences while living in NI. They noted that social media was a central means of connecting with young people and could be used to enable them to engage in TBUC.

Ms Killen thanked James and Sarah for all their work and went on to say how beneficial the work was in highlighting young people’s views after which invited Paul Killen of CRC to outline the workshops and the delegates to take a comfort break.

**Break and Workshop session**

After a short break, delegates took part in workshops to discuss the following questions,

“How do we encourage greater participation by young people in good relations activity?”

“How do we improve young people’s attitudes towards minority ethnic communities in NI?”

“What do we in this room need to do to improve optimism of good relations among young people?” “How can we increase levels of respect?”

Following the hour long workshops the facilitators reported back to the panel.

Ms Killen invited the facilitators to report back the key points and actions from the workshops.

**Workshop 1; How do we encourage greater participation by young people in GR activity?**

The points fed back from the first workshops included the need for positive role models and influencers within communities to encourage participation, young ambassadors, celebrities and use of social media. T:BUC branding, for example the T:BUC hoodies, helped raise the awareness of the work being done. Collaborating with schools, youth clubs and other social action was needed to add value to schools curriculum. It was felt it was also important to ensure young people needed to be at the start of any planning process. It was reported that participation and engagement with all sections of the community must be a positive one.

Ms Killen introduced the panel speakers: Linsey Farrell, The Executive Office, David Price, Community Relations in Schools, Jacqueline Irwin, Community Relations Council, and Dr Schubotz, QUB. Ms Killen invited each to respond to the points raised.

**Panel feedback**

Linsey Farrell responded citing the example of Urban Villages and use of celebrities. It’s not the celebrities that had the greatest impact but rather people we can relate to and the use of local recognisable role models. It was young leaders / influence’s that young people can relate to. Again citing the Urban Villages programme Linsey explained that young people were sitting on the Young People’s reference groups and also on the larger reference groups. In Linsey’s experience it was important to make sure communication is relevant for young people.

David Price felt that use of social media was an important medium for raising the voice of young people. He stressed that young people should be engaged throughout the planning and delivery of projects. Participation in the Pride festival for example was essential, as non-engagement sent a negative message to young people, that only certain people can be part of belonging to the community, when in fact NI is welcoming and supportive to all sections of the community.

Jacqueline Irwin pointed out that young people look to relatable people for inspiration. It was important to get those people who are part of normal society to support good relations events and activity and to work towards showing good relations is not a special activity but rather an everyday activity. Jacqueline went on to suggest that what happens in the school classroom, youth activity and good relations projects, no matter how good the project, it will have little or no impact, if all the other areas of a young people’s life are telling them something different. Good relations work should be focusing on getting into everyone’s everyday life.

**Workshop 2: Improving attitudes towards minority ethnic groups**

Feedback included the view there was a need for creating opportunities for engagement. There is a need to create a safe environment and that minority ethnic groups shouldn’t be seen as a separate entity but rather as part of the whole community. Projects should be delivered on an ongoing basis rather than being seen as one offs. The need for collaborative working between agencies and groups was highlighted to enable greater participation

Dr Schubotz raised the point that it is easy for people to say they are happy to engage with minority ethnic groups when they aren’t living next to them. Dr Schubotz advocated that face to face contact is essential for the development of good relations. He stated, from his experience, he has found that face to face engagement was essential to break down barriers.

Ms Killen recalled a recent NICS staff event where minority ethnic people presented to the NICS group and how the impact of hearing people’s personal experiences had been considerable.

Ms Farrell agreed with the idea that minority ethnic groups aren’t a standalone group nor were issues they experienced exclusive to them. The community is becoming increasing diverse and therefore minority ethnic groups should be fully integrated into the community. Many of the projects delivered are focused on participation by minority ethnic and new comer families in partnership with resident communities at a very human level. It’s important to engage at a human personal level.

David Price advocated the need for sustained involvement with minority ethnic sections of the community. He highlighted that schools are a major access route but for it to be successful the schools need to have a collaborative process with both schools and other agencies, communities and families. He cited the “Forward Together” project that engaged with schools, parents and communities in the promotion of good relations.

Ms Irwin noted that it was essential good relations work should be viewed as peer learning and a humanitarian project. Ms Irwin felt this was at the heart of learning. It is important the process be collaborative both within each sector and across sectors. Issues being experienced by minority ethnic groups cannot be seen as a separate issue. Experience from Britain has shown that multicultural society creates silos with all the problems that has brought. Intercultural society is creating services for all sections of the community. It is vital to engage in a wider all-society conversation.

Ms Killen invited responses from the 4th workshop as she wished to finish the feedback on the third workshop topic of Optimism.

**Workshop 4: How can we increase levels of Respect?**

The facilitator fed back saying that continued outreach with minority ethnic groups was important, in particular with needs based interventions and young people involved at all levels of the process. The group felt that shared education should be pursued in the future.

A representative from the Education Authority took the opportunity to outline the work being delivered by the Education Authority for young people through their youth camps and invited participants to engage with their programme.

Ms Killen posed a question to the panel; what more can we do to normalise TBUC beyond the branding currently being delivered?

Ms Irwin responded by saying that there has been a lot learnt about branding and creating a sense of community wide engagement. It was important to consider the efforts of all combined, being greater than the sum of our parts. The branding and highlighting of T:BUC and good relations should be scaled up to a societal level, citing an example in Glasgow where billboards were used to promote an individual’s role in making Glasgow a better place.

David Price mentioned that within the group he participated, there was a lot of conversation around communication across sectors and with young people and the variety of ways it could be achieved. He noted there is no consensus between the large variety of funding schemes and policy programmes in Northern Ireland on how to brand good relations work. He felt that it was important that people in the wider community be aware of the good relations activity currently taking place.

Ms Farrell outlined that T:BUC good relations strategy is the central plank to the delivery of good relations work across Northern Ireland, along with a range other actions complimenting that work. She noted that the Urban Villages programme is viewed by some as a regeneration programme whereas it is in fact a good relations programme using regeneration as the method of engagement. Linsey went on to say that it was important to be able to deliver good relations by using a wide range of methodologies and interventions. Further it’s important to celebrate young people’s contribution to the community rather than focusing on the idea that young people are the problem.

**Workshop 3; Optimism**:

Facilitator’s feedback included the need to look at a new definition of good relations, to move past the emphasis on only Protestants and Catholics. For young people, employability, resilience, personal development, health and wellbeing are major factors in their lives but equally too we must address segregation. This process must include greater young people participation. The question was raised as to why young people are not as optimistic as older people? Positive political leadership was needed as well adults needing to take responsibility for being optimistic for young people.

Ms Killen responded and asked the question why young people are more negative towards good relations than adults? She agreed the need to explore the issue further. Ms Killen put forward one suggestion, that young people haven’t experienced the Troubles directly and therefore perceive Northern Ireland differently. The definition of good relations should be revised to reflect that Northern Ireland society was far more than orange and green. She acknowledged Northern Ireland had now significantly changed and a new definition should reflect the more multicultural Northern Ireland.

Dr Schubotz felt that good relations was a long term process and tackling segregation was essential. He felt that integrated education is vital. He went on to say that segregation within schools has a huge negative impact on society. It is vital for schools to connect and engage to ensure regular ongoing face to face contact was achieved.

Ms Irwin stated we need to make good relations ordinary in everyone’s lives. Young people don’t see good relations as an issue in their lives, that is until you challenge them and it can be seen that good relations components are integral elements of the issues they face. Safe spaces, friendships, bullying, wellbeing, identity and unconsciously living separate lives. Ms Irwin felt that optimism is a moral duty within all our work to make NI a better place.

Mr Price indicated that good relations is no longer seen as an issue based agenda and while religious, political and national identity still separates communities, good relations is seen as a medium for change and when schools and their wider community engage, there is greater participation and positive outcomes. David cited examples which included the Holy Cross School and the Corrymeela “Visions for tomorrow” project.

Ms Farrell noted it was vital to have a clear understanding where young people are at and their basic needs and we should frame good relations in terms of issues young people related to such as mental health, global media and lack of resilience. It was important to provide a common shared vision that young people could relate to. Any work being delivered should also be within an area based context. Equally too, evaluation of impact must take into account and reflect how do we best tell the story to demonstrate how far we’ve come and look at outcomes and impact rather than just on outputs. There is a need to tell the story better.

**Closing Remarks**:

Ms Killen thanked the panel and delegates for participating. She then updated the conference on the date of next Engagement Forum, 12th February 2019, venue to be confirmed.