**Summary Record**

**Together: Building a United Community**

**Engagement Forum**

 **Thursday 15th June 2017, 9.30 – 2pm**

On 15 June 2017, the Executive Office (TEO) and over 160 community practitioners, policymakers and academics gathered in Girdwood Community Hub, Belfast for the fourth meeting of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Engagement Forum. The event focused on the T:BUC priority of ***Our Shared Community*** regarding challenges and opportunities*to create a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone* and the draftProgramme for Government (2016 – 2021) good relation outcome on shared space and reconciliation.

**Mark Browne, The Executive Office**

Mark informed delegates that a [September 2016 summary record](https://www.community-relations.org.uk/sites/crc/files/media-files/TBUC-Engagement-Forum-SUMMARY-RECORD-September-2016_final2.docx) from the September 2016 meeting was available on the Community Relations Council (CRC) website. He acknowledged the current difficulties in relation to the current political impasse and budgets and provided an update on the implementation of the T:BUC Strategy. [2016/17 Update Report](file:///%5C%5Ccrserver%5CUsersdata%5CGattwood%5CGemma%20Attwood%5C2017%20EVENTS%5CTBUC%20Engagement%20Forum%5CJune%202017%5CPresentations%5CPresentation%20for%20TBUC%20Engagement%20Forum%20on%2015.06.17%20-%20Mark%20Browne.pptx)

Focusing on the key conference themes, Mark explained that the Fresh Start Agreement has committed to creating a new Programme for Government (PfG). The draft PfG includes 13 high level outcomes, each with a number of indicators to measure progress with a key focus on impact and making a difference.

The key outcome relating to good relations within the draft PfG is; “that we are a

shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity with the themes of

respect, shared space and reconciliation.”

Progress against shared space and reconciliation will be measured through selected

good relations indicators that are already in place but open to being enhanced and

Mark encouraged delegates to explore related issues in the workshops.

**Fintan Brady, Partisan Productions, Artistic Director *- Like/Share*** **- short film**

Fintan reported on the production of the film and explained that the short film[*Like/Share*](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/m1d0x9sorje60x1/AAC-1qL64qz1DmhtdVk8aYQ3a?dl=0) was made with the help of young people from south and east Belfast and attempts to open up what the extraordinarily odd notion of ‘Shared Space’ actually means to them.  These are young citizens whose opinion we value and make no presumptions about. The film is intended to contribute to a discussion, not to provide answers.

Fintan explained that although the film *Like/Share* is a challenging piece, the

filmmakers found the young people to be very decent about being honest and trying

to think through a question that most had never been asked or, if they had, they’d

been asked it in a context in which they were essentially fed the answer. The film

opened up a few genuine questions around what is an extremely complicated idea in

relation to what is shared; what is a space and what does shared space even mean?

Fintan also considered how this conversation could take place with even younger

people, in what context could that conversation take place and what reference points

do they have?

The reason the film has the title *Like/Share,* is that when young people thought

through what a shared space would be like, it felt a bit like the internet and they

developed some ideas around that. Further conversations should be facilitated with more young people on this and many of the other thoughts and ideas articulated in the film.

**Professor Brandon Hamber, INCORE International Conflict Research**

***Reconciliation: A Road Forward?***

Professor Brandon Hamber gave an overview on the working definition of reconciliation which he and Gráinne Kelly developed in 2004.

Brandon talked about the concept and idea of reconciliation as something which is contentious and that it is not always a very popular topic to talk about (for various reasons), but hoped that delegates would explore the working definition as a useful starting point. He encouraged delegates to focus on the question mark in the title of his *talk Reconciliation: A Road Forward?* – and explore if it is a road forward and if it a useful concept to them and their work.

The presentation explored the concept of reconciliation both in theory and practice. Brandon noted that reconciliation as an idea is not only difficult and challenging here, but all over the world.

Brandon and Gráinne Kelly have been carrying out research since 2004 on the

concept both locally and globally, and are currently engaged in work for the Kofi Annan Foundation, which is exploring case studies all over the world that reflect on whether this concept is useful.

Early findings from their research show that the concept of reconciliation is used in many different ways, different people prioritise aspects of the term, whilst other people de-emphasize different parts. For example, for some, economic development is seen as leading to a change in relationships, for others relationships need to change first and social and economic change follows.

In relation to policy, the *Together: Building a United Community* (T:BUC) uses the word reconciliation a lot, over 20 times in fact. T:BUC refers to how “our history has left a legacy of hurt and division that we must address in building a better future and achieving the reconciliation that will enable us to continue to progress towards a united community”. T:BUC states that it is committed to ensuring good relations, and we need to encourage greater sharing and maximise opportunities for reconciliation. It tells us achieving the reconciliation will enable us to continue to progress towards a united community and develop economically. And in another part it notes reconciliation and ensuring good relations are at the heart of the planning of the new service delivery models.

Brandon asked delegates to consider what this means for those working in the community relations field and whether or not they thought T:BUC was just an aspirational vision. The draft Programme for Government mentions reconciliation 17 times so it is not only T:BUC. Brandon asked if that was helpful and something which can be built upon?

However, Brandon also noted that despite the terms being used in policy documents there was no clear definition of reconciliation. In his and Gráinne’s, research they found that some people thought of it as being about accommodation and a term which is used politically and not something that you hear in community relations work. Others have a more theological understanding of the concept. Still others think it was a term imported from places like South Africa.

Brandon made two points for delegates to consider when thinking about defining reconciliation.

Firstly, is there a difference in talking about reconciliation at a social level, political level and at an interpersonal level. For example, if you are coming to terms with being a victim of the conflict, is that different to the political process of parties and others coming together in some way to shape a new future? Are those compatible or are there tensions between the two?

Secondly, international research shows that there seems to be “thick and thin” versions of reconciliation (Kriesberg). A “thick” version is that reconciliation is about changing relationships between different groups of people and deeply transformative, creating new cultures, new ways of being, new ways of relating to each other. The “thin” version of reconciliation is about co-existence, i.e. “you walk down one side of the street and I’ll walk down the other side and, as long as we are we’re not killing each other, we are broadly reconciled”. Our research has shown over the years that many people say that their community is not ready for reconciliation. This suggests that intuitively people see reconciliation as a “thick” transformative process.

Brandon felt that the young people in the “Like/Share” film seemed to oscillate between this thick-thin theory of reconciliation when they talked about McDonalds as a place to share space (thin) and trying to change cultures by interacting with each other (thick).

Brandon also talked about reconciliation being tied in with politics and gave South Africa as an example where reconciliation was used as part of the transition process. As a result, today some people see it as a term for papering over the cracks of the past, and others see it as a term never fully operationalised, as a way of really trying to build sustainable relationships between different races.

Which of these two approaches apply to NI?

Brandon then reflected on their 2004 research funded by the CRC to try and understand what the concept of reconciliation means. This research led to the Hamber-Kelly working definition of reconciliation. He noted that the working definition was then taken on by the EU Peace Programme and used in their funding programme in a different manner to the way in which it been intended. Nevertheless, it was good to see it being used and their current research shows people still are interested in the working definition.

As a springboard to the workshop, Brandon explained what he and Gráinne Kelly understand reconciliation to be using the working definition. Before outlining the definition he said three points needed to be understood about reconciliation.

Firstly, it’s a component of peace building. Brandon said they see peace building as a much bigger process such as institutional change; new political arrangements; engagement of civil society or economic reconstruction. Reconciliation is a sub component of the peace building agenda that addresses relationship issues. The challenge is that actually all aspects of peace building have a relationship component, for example, where you decide to build a road or a new community centre is also going to be about relationships not just economic reconstruction.

Secondly, and more specifically, reconciliation can be viewed as being about addressing conflicted and fractured relationships. However, the word reconciliation implies that you had a relationship in the first place and you are reconciling. Whereas, in most divided societies people did not have a relationship, so you are not only reconciling but actually creating relationships in some cases.

Thirdly, process in relation to reconciliation, is also important. It’s not about an outcome (shaking hands, being friends), reconciliation is the process of how we try and address these fractured relationships. It is voluntary and cannot be imposed.

The working definition has five interwoven strands:

* Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society;
* Acknowledging and dealing with the past;
* Building positive relationships;
* Significant cultural and attitudinal change; and
* Substantial social, economic and political change.

See *Appendix One* for a more detailed outline of the strands.

The first strand is about developing a shared vision of an interdependent and a shared society. This does not mean that everyone here has to have the same political vision or agrees on the constitutional question. But there is no point in saying we want to rebuild relationships if there is not some sense of why you are actually doing it, where you actually want to go. A common vision can be: we want a better life for our children or we want an end to violence.

The second part is about acknowledgment of, and dealing with, the past. If the vision is forward looking, then dealing with the past is backward looking. Who hurt whom and why did it happen? How do we understand what happened in the past? How do we acknowledge the hurts and address them.

This work must be accompanied by a new vision, but also the third and fourth strands which involve an active process of trying to build relationships aimed at trying to make significant cultural or attitudinal change. Building relationships is proactive and not just about having people in the same room.

The final strand is about equality. You cannot talk about rebuilding relationships if people remain fundamentally unequal whether that is economically, politically or socially. This requires building some sense of equality within your society at the same time as addressing relationship issues.

One challenge however is that there are paradoxes in the strands and that they can actually contradict each other. For example, in South Africa we need to rebuild relationships between communities but also need to change the economic balance in the society. In other words, you’re telling people “I’m going to take something away from you and I want you to rebuild a relationship with the person I’m giving it to at the same time”. Or you might say to some people, “we’re going to have to compromise on issues of the past such the release of ex-prisoners so we can rebuild relationships between a wider community”. This is the challenge of reconciliation. Issues stand in tension with one another. A mark of reconciliation might be how we balance all these tensions.

A further challenge is where people come from, often influences how they see relationships (we call this this reconciliation ideologies), e.g. people with a religious perspective might see change in relationships being about “seeing the light” and that it is an internal process, as a colleague from South Africa Hugo van der Merwe used to say. Lawyers might say people change relationships when they feel “the heat”. Some believe people would only behave differently to each other if there is better human rights protection and equality. We must unpack our assumptions about reconciliation.

In conclusion, the working definition has also been used as a way of trying to make a diagnosis of where a society might be on the relationship question or in terms of reconciliation. Have we been good at the vision stuff; building relationships and cultural and attitudinal change; addressing inequality and dealing with the past? Or only some of these.

Our research shows that in Northern Ireland our biggest investment has been in relationship building between communities. There has been a massive investment including over €2b European Peace Programme funding, and all the work represented in the room. Also, although there are disparities, communities are moving closer together economically. The lack of a common vision is one of the weakest parts of the reconciliation agenda. It is interesting that reconciliation is written into documents like T:BUC but politicians do not stand up together and talk about that vision. Dealing with the past is also, always noted as being incomplete. We still do not have a comprehensive overarching process.

The working definition therefore helps us think about where future energies might need to be put as we move forward.

**Workshop feedback**

**Feedback from the workshops was collated. A panel consisting of Jacqueline**

**Irwin (CRC), Grainne Killen (TEO), Brandon Hamber (INCORE) and Grainne**

**Kelly (INCORE) reported back the views and opinions of Forum delegates.**

**Linsey Farrell (TEO) also presented delegates with an update on T:BUC’s**

**Urban Village Programme.**

**Jacqueline Irwin (CRC), Grainne Killen (TEO) relayed feedback on the theme of**

**Shared Space:**

**Shared Space question 1 *- how would you define shared space: what are its key elements?***

In terms of how you would define shared space and what are the key elements of it,

a point that came across really clearly is that shared space is a very difficult concept

with no common understanding of what we mean by sharing. There is also a query

about what we mean by space eg it can refer to physical space; headspace; web

space; social media space and for the young people in the short film shown, it was

simply somewhere where anyone can go and be happy.

Safety, also emerged as fundamental, in order to be able to share space. Also

discussed, was the idea of neutral spaces and anonymous spaces where there is

very little engagement at all but it is a relatively safe space because nobody is really

saying anything about who they are to anybody else. In fact, the young people

referred to it as somewhere where you don’t even have to speak in person to

anyone.

People questioned if shared space was about the space itself, the nature of the

activity that takes place in it or the depth of engagement in that activity? The general

feeling was that it was more about the depth of engagement than the physical

structure and along with cross-community engagement, it was also as much about

intergenerational multicultural sharing.

The relationship between shared space and the existing demographics in an area

featured highly in workshops in relation to following the natural flow of people’s lives

to find opportunities and points for connection such as sport, school, recreational

activities and so on and build on them rather than forced sharing in an unnatural

way.

Some also commented that we also need to make better use of existing space which

is important when trying to make sustainable interventions rather than one off

interventions. Workshops suggested that no one model is going to achieve shared

space but that everyone should think about how they can increase sharing in

whatever they are doing and to ensure bottom-up and top-down interventions were also supported.

Responses also recommended that we also need to do more about removing

markers of single identity in all of the shared spaces to open up that broader sense

of welcome. This was not aimed at taking away anything from an individual or

community sense of identity but recognising this may cause unintended

consequence for everyone else who wants to use that space.

**Shared Space question 2 *- what shared space approaches have worked well and what should we do more of?***

Feedback highlighted the need for leadership, key messages, political vision and

support from the Executive as being absolutely critical in relation to enabling local

interventions.

There was quite a long list of shared space interventions mentioned including sport, music, cultural tourism, green spaces, training and education, physical structures and much more. Examples to support this included

* Belfast City Centre
* Ebrington and Peace Bridge – good example of a truly shared space
* V36 adventure playground is a designed shared space in Newtownabbey
* Learning community in Londonderry which moves into different areas across the city.
* Connswater Community Greenway
* People’s Park Portadown,
* CS Lewis Square
* Mo Mowlam Park at Stormont
* Dungannon Park
* Colin Glen Forest Park – The Gruffalo Trail
* The Junction
* Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast
* Braid Arts Centre Ballymena
* Girdwood Community Hub
* Crumlin Road Gaol
* Titanic
* Waterfront
* The MAC
* Shankill Women’s Centre/Little Wonders childcare facility
* Schomberg House
* Apprentice Boys Hall in Derry
* T13 Urban Centre – young people from all areas BMX/Skating/operates – service connects them
* [Ecos Millennium Environmental Centre](https://www.bing.com/local?lid=YN1029x1183225284408283251&id=YN1029x1183225284408283251&q=Ecos+Millennium+Environmental+Centre+Ballymena&name=Ecos+Millennium+Environmental+Centre&cp=54.87264~-6.267127&qpvt=eco+centre+ballymena),Ballymena
* East Belfast Urban Village
* Shared housing developments and shared campuses
* Integrated schools
* Community Gardens – Ballymena and other places
* Libraries – Refugee Week – Decade of Centenaries etc.
* Programmes and organisations such as game of three halves and Beat Initiative – organic way of developing shared space and sports
* Cultural tourism strategies have helped to break down barriers to build confidence

People emphasised many times that shared space is not so much a physical space

but a way of interacting in the space.

A number of responses also made reference to green spaces being used not only as a response to community sharing but in dealing with the environment. People recognised the crossovers between community relations, good relations issues and this notion of wider benefits.

A holistic approach to regeneration was believed to also offer a good opportunity for

shared space development. Finally, it was really remarkable the number of people

who picked up on the fact that big social events such as Culture night, the MELA, the

May Day parade, Pride, the Lantern Parade in north Belfast and so on - that are not

necessarily badged as being good relations events but bring about a much stronger

sense of who we are and how proud we are to be in this place.

**Gráinne Kelly and Professor Brandon Hamber, INCORE, University of Ulster**

**provided feedback on the theme of Reconciliation:**

**Reconciliation question 1 - *consider the five strands of the*** [***Hamber/Kelly working definition of reconciliation***](https://www.community-relations.org.uk/sites/crc/files/Reconciliation%20A%20working%20definition.docx) ***and discuss if the 5 strand model is a useful way to define reconciliation?***

The first observation is that there wasn’t a lot of feedback in terms whether the term ‘reconciliation’ itself was useful or not. Some people even suggested that we focus on integration rather than the term ‘reconciliation’ and others commented that there is a step before reconciliation which is around breaking the deadlock of fear.

Some of the comments around the draft definition were that it was very useful

because it is not prescriptive, can help promote discussion and you can take from it

what is useful. It helps to focus the mind and is a useful tool for understanding. The

draft definition was thought to be wider than some of the narrower measures

contained in the policy documents.

However, it was recommended that the draft definition be more explicit about the

inclusion of our multicultural society as it may be interpreted to focus on the two main

traditions in Northern Ireland only. Some people felt that the definition would only work if all people buy into all aspects of it, so that it becomes an all or nothing approach.

Although many people found the definition to be very useful, they questioned how it

would work in practice, how do we really implement it and how does it apply to

issues of poverty, deprivation, inequality and gender issues in particular?

Unsurprisingly, a number of comments were made around political leadership, how

our politicians should provide real leadership in moving the various strands of

reconciliation forward and the need for political stability to achieve this.

The question of how we measure reconciliation came up in relation to how we track

change and identify what has usefully happened. So, how do we apply the definition

to specific context so that we can meet communities and different stages where they

are at and move the process forward.

**Reconciliation question 2 - *What reconciliation approaches have worked well and what should we do more of?***

The most interesting aspect of the feedback was the diversity of good relations work

people were engaged in which they felt was a critical part of reconciliation. This

included youth work, ex-prisoners, parades, bonfires, interface work, sports, arts,

music, dialogue work, inter-church work, integrated and shared education, toddler groups, storytelling, safe conversations and much more.

In respect of what more was needed, people highlighted the critical issue of

leadership and the need to fully implement the Good Friday Agreement to get the

political context working to enable reconciliation work to progress.

People encouraged more focus on holistic work tailored much more to people’s

needs in order to create a sense of buy-in and give people what they need rather

than what others think they need. This work needs to be less bureaucratic and more

focused on long-term, sustainable resources and relationships.

There was a sense that more people needed to be involved in projects, for example,

the summer schemes may be only reaching a certain number of young people and

more work also needed to be done with the 55 plus age. There should be more of a focus on upgrading of skills, whether that’s on confidence levels or specific skills such as IT. More attention should also be paid to assessment to determine what works.

Interestingly, people thought that sometimes we focus too much on division to the

exclusion of positive programmes that do not necessarily focus on highlighting the

problems but rather getting on with certain types of work. We need to be more considerate about how reconciliation programmes key into poverty work e.g. one comment mentioned social clauses for development being linked into different types of programmes.

The need for increased opportunities for integrated education was mentioned along

with more personal experience in sharing, creating resilience in communities and

engaging people from wider backgrounds which might not just be along traditional

lines but more multicultural.

**URBAN VILLAGES - UPDATE**

Linsey Farrell, TEO, Director for Urban Villages, Racial Equality & Interface Issues, Finance, Strategic Planning & Social Change Directorate, also updated the conference on the T:BUC Urban Villages programme.

The Urban Villages programme is led by The Executive Office and is one of the

seven headline actions within the Executive’s T:BUC strategy. It is an approach that

works across five areas of multiple deprivation with a history of conflict and still

enduring the legacy brought about by conflict and community tensions. It is a way of

bringing those communities together to create a positive common vision for the area

which focuses on the impact and positive outcomes that can be achieved through

regeneration and improvements to the physical environment alongside also

supporting those changes with building relationships and building community

capacity and fostering positive community identities in those areas.

**Appendix One**

A Working Definition of Reconciliation Brandon Hamber & Gráinne Kelly

# A Working Definition of Reconciliation

## © Brandon Hamber & Gráinne Kelly

Our working hypothesis is that reconciliation is a necessary process following conflict. However, we believe it is a **voluntary act** and **cannot be imposed** (IDEA, 2003). It involves five interwoven and related strands:

|  |
| --- |
| **Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society** The articulation of a common vision of an interdependent, just, equitable, open and diverse society. The development of a vision of a shared future requiring the involvement of the whole society, at all levels.  |
| **Acknowledging and dealing with the past** Acknowledging the hurt, losses, truths and suffering of the past. Providing the mechanisms for justice, healing, restitution or reparation, and restoration (including apologies if necessary and steps aimed at redress). Individuals and institutions acknowledge their own role in the conflicts of the past, accepting and learning from it in a constructive way so as to guarantee non-repetition.  |
| **Building positive relationships** Relationship building or renewal following violent conflict addressing issues of trust, prejudice, intolerance in this process resulting in accepting commonalities and differences, and embracing and engaging with those who are different to us.  |
| **Significant cultural and attitudinal change** Changes in how people relate to, and their attitudes towards, one another. The culture of suspicion, fear, mistrust and violence is broken down and opportunities and space opened up in which people can hear and be heard. A culture of respect for human rights and human difference is developed creating a context where each citizen becomes an active participant in society and feels a sense of belonging.  |
| **Substantial social, economic and political change** The social, economic and political structures which gave rise to the conflict and estrangement are identified, reconstructed or addressed, and transformed.  |

Two other factors are critically important, namely: Reconciliation involves a **PARADOX**, e.g. reconciliation promotes an encounter between the open expression of the painful past but at the same time seeks a long-term, interdependent future (see Lederach, 1997). Reconciliation as a concept is always influenced by an individual’s underlying assumptions. There are different **IDEOLOGIES** of reconciliation, e.g. a religious ideology often emphasises the re-discovering of a new conscience of individuals and society through moral reflection, repentance, confession and rebirth, but a human rights approach might see it as a process only achieved by regulating social interaction through the rule of law and preventing certain forms of violations of rights from happening again (see Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; van der Merwe, 1999; Hamber, 2002).

Working definition by Brandon Hamber (✉ b.hamber@ulster.ac.uk) and Gráinne Kelly (✉ g.kelly@ulster.ac.uk).

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Working definition developed and adapted from: IDEA, 2003; Lederach, 1997; Porter, 2003; ADM/CPA, 2000; Rigby, 2001; Hamber, 2002; Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; van der Merwe, 1999; Assefa 2001

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