

**Speech made at Corrick House, Clogher,  
on 30 September 2008  
by Joan Clements, Victims and Survivors Officer, Community Relations  
Council**

**Reaching Out – The Gift of Time**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you today to celebrate the accredited volunteer befriending programme: reaching out and the gift of time.

Time is a precious gift and especially when time is given to those who are lonely, vulnerable, feeling isolated or even forgotten.

Many of us complain that we do not have enough time in our very busy lives but for others it can feel like the days are long, the nights are long and time passes slowly. That is why time is precious. It is a precious gift that 65 of you here tonight have agreed to give to colleagues, to widows, to bereaved parents, to injured and to others in need of time. It is your gift.

This journey began sometime in 2003 when I thought because I had completed the core funding assessments and money was given out that I was going to feel bored in CRC with little to do. Then I discovered small grants.

Firstly I set sail for South East Fermanagh Foundation to talk about how we could look at developing:

“projects that can demonstrate how they will help people to begin to make the transition from victims to survivor as part of a process of healing and recovery” (just one of the criteria in the small grants scheme).

I met the staff and we talked about what members might feel would be beneficial. I was told me that many would really enjoy a day away in peaceful surroundings with a nice meal together before coming home to behind closed doors.

The trip was arranged and after it was over I eagerly headed back to hear “how did it go?” The staff were somewhat downcast I thought but one went on to say that it was a great day with everyone enjoying their time away and time together.

However the downside that was shared was that no one had realized how many members needed help. Some older members needing physical help to wheel wheelchairs and other just someone to talk with whilst they took a short break from caring.

It made me think that day of the many people who could be in similar situations and what ways we could use our small grants to assist and also how the Health & Social Services could help.

#### So What Next

In order to gauge the need for support I talked to the core funded groups and asked them if they would participate in research to look into the needs of carers. 12 groups participated and Eileen McGlone conducted the Research. There were many interesting findings and recommendations but overwhelmingly it was established that there was a great deal of need across Northern Ireland that was not being met. Eileen described to me that in doing the research she often sat late into the night just allowing people to talk and share what they have been through and going through.

For some it was the first time they felt they were being asked about “what it has been like?” and “what is it like?”

The research revealed irrefutable evidence to confirm a high level of burn out. Almost 9 out of 10 carers had very high levels of burn out in relation to emotional exhaustion with many no longer feeling they were accomplishing anything by caring.

There was a high level of need for respite care but not just placing their loved one in a home but help that would also help the carer. We in CRC are continuing to seek to educate those in Health & Social Care about the unique needs of those affected by the Troubles.

However another finding was the social isolation of carers. Eileen wrote:

“There is a high level of isolation and exclusion amongst the carer population exacerbated through an inability for a range of reasons to leave the victim to whom care is provided. However many said that there was a great value in the positive benefits of talking and sharing experiences with those in similar situations to themselves to someone who understood what they were going through.”

Eileen recommended:

“There needs to be the development of an outreach befriending service that provides ongoing individual support for carers and victims and takes into account the wider issues, building trust, continuity of relationship and the wider impact of trauma on the whole family unit.”

Not just the next of kin but the mother, the father, the son, the daughter, grandmother, grandfather, grandchild, aunt, uncle and so on.

The Carers report was launched on 1 March 2005. That same day it was announced that the Victims Unit were providing £400,000 to develop the befriending service. Definitely no more boredom.

Around that time the different groups were coming together and preparing to work in geographical areas to provide help to those in need of their services. All were keen to begin the training although there was some apprehension around as for many the school bag had long been hung up..

The training commenced and prior to tonight we have had 2 other events to celebrate The Gift of Time. One was in Baronscourt where 96 volunteers received certificates and the other in the Linen Green where 20 volunteers received their certificates but here tonight we see the result of your hard work.

I have heard on many occasions that the training was enjoyable as well as educational and I am led to believe that Eileen although a hard taskmaster was easy to learn with. I think there was a lot of laughter whilst dealing with painful and difficult subjects.

But it has been beneficial with many groups developing a bond, a bond now that we in CRC need to support.

CRC have a challenge to face as many befrienders are now trained alongside coordinators but that is only the beginning. We recognize that you need support for the work that you are doing on a daily basis. We need to give that support and we need to do so in a way that helps you. We are currently putting supervision in place and we will listen to you to ensure that we have got it right and if we haven't then we will think again. We have heard that as you deal with very painful issues, for example illness and bereavement, you need the support and also some more but different training. I have heard what you have said and promise to aim to deliver.

I want to see a Quality service, a service of excellence and I believe we are on that journey together.

The work that you are doing, in giving that precious gift of time, makes it so worthwhile.

Thank you one and all.