



**T:BUC Engagement Forum
“Good Relations Across the Atlantic”**

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2pm - 6pm
Forum held via Zoom

Contributors:

Gareth Johnston, Acting Director of Strategic Policy, Equality and Good Relations (GJ), The Executive Office (TEO)
Paul Givan, First Minister (PG), NI Executive
Michelle O’Neill, deputy First Minister (MoN), NI Executive
Eamonn McConville, Deputy Director (EMc), NI Bureau in Washington D.C.
Paul Narain, US Consul General (PN)
Bill Evans, Commissioner of the Boston Police College (BE), Keynote Address
Chris Gardner, (CG) The Executive Office
Peter Day, (PD) Community Relations Council
Richard Cushnie, (RC) The Executive Office

Welcomes and Introduction:

Gareth Johnston – Acting Director or Strategic Policy, Equality and Good Relations, The Executive Office

GJ welcomed all delegates from Northern Ireland and America to a very special T:BUC Engagement Forum. GJ explained that he had just recently taken over from Chris Stewart as Acting Director of Strategic Policy, Equality and Good Relations in The Executive Office.

Due to urgent commitments and to comply with timings on the agenda, GJ invited the First Minister, Mr Paul Givan, to address the delegates.

Ministers' Remarks

Mr Paul Givan, First Minister

PG welcomed all delegates to the special event; noting it was the first time T:BUC has linked with its American counterparts. PG explained that Northern Ireland and America share a close relationship on many levels, and it was particularly fitting that today's contributors are from Boston, Belfast's Sister City.

PG expressed his hopes that, while this is the first international Forum, it would not be the last and there would be other opportunities for delegates to work together, share experiences and learn from each other in the future.

PG highlighted that Boston, like Belfast, is a vibrant mix of communities which is beneficial in many ways. It brings challenges; communities like to feel safe while expressing their culture and integration with other people. PG said he was interested to hear about some of the issues faced in Boston and how they have overcome them.

PG explained that the T:BUC strategy reflects the Executive's commitment to building a united society in Northern Ireland. He was pleased to say that progress continues to be made to further that aim across a number of programmes.

Many of the good relations projects funded through the Good Relations Fund have continued despite the impact of COVID. Last year the Fund awarded over three million pounds which will impact approximately forty thousand people across Northern Ireland. The feedback received has been pleasing in terms of the stability provided by the projects. There is a real benefit to participants during lockdown in particular and the online delivery insured impact across wider areas, both urban and rural.

The district councils in Northern Ireland have continued to deliver programmes across all areas. The Executive Office awarded over three million pounds to councils to deliver programmes, targeting over 10 thousand participants. PG thanked the effort of council and their good relations officers for sustaining the delivery of these programmes in challenging circumstances.

Many of the projects supported under the Peace IV programme are now drawing to a close and PG said it was positive to see the impact they have had in building peace and promoting good relations here and in the border counties. The Peace Programme had made a tremendous contribution to peace and reconciliation here and is working towards the next phase of the Peace Plus programme, which is expected to have a funding budget of approximately €1 Billion and will provide a vitally important platform to build on the progress that has been made here in Northern Ireland across communities.

Urban Villages and local communities are working together to promote good relations through projects which foster positive community identities, build capacity, improve the physical environment, creates thriving places and safer communities. In the months ahead communities and the Urban Villages team will together be looking at the future and ways to build upon what has been achieved so far to fully realise the ambitions of these projects. The challenging opportunity that is presented to all of us is to work better together creating and strengthening these connections so we can amplify the impact of our shared work in improving and sustaining good relations.

The Peace IV youth programme remains on track to meet the target that was set in T:BUC by engaging with 10,000 young people offering skills and employment training while fostering good relations and a shared future.

The Department of Justice is involved in removing interface barriers and continues to make progress in a number of sites. The work is often complex and challenging and it is important that we do not lose sight of the many ways that progress is being made in communities.

Finally, the Shared Housing Programme continues to excel. The aim being to create communities of good neighbours to ensure that there is a greater choice open to those who wish to live in a 'mixed' area. There are now forty-five shared housing schemes built or under construction and each is supported through a community led good relations plan.

PG said it was clear that progress continues to be made through T:BUC and he remains committed to fully realising the ambitions that are set out in that strategy.

PG extended a warm welcome to the new United States Consul General, Paul Narain.

He hoped that everyone has a great day at this unique event and looked forward to getting an update on how the event proceeds.

Ms Michelle O'Neill, deputy First Minister

MoN welcomed everyone in English and Irish and said she was delighted to have the opportunity to reach out and to speak to attendees, if even for a short while.

MoN said it was a real pleasure to welcome the special international guests and said that this Forum, as part of Good Relations Week, was essential.

MoN said she looked forward to the day when everyone could get back into a room and talk to each other face to face and hoped over the coming months there would be opportunities to do that.

MoN said she felt it was important for everyone to reach outside their comfort zone and look to others to share experiences, examples, ways of working, knowledge and expertise and make things better for all people as we try to shape a better future for us all.

MoN joined with PG in welcoming Paul Narain. Noting he was starting at a very challenging time in terms of COVID, but also a time of opportunity, as everyone looks towards a better future. She said she was looking forward to working with him. Two years ago, it was never imagined that organisations in America would be taking part in the T:BUC Forum, but it was great to see it.

She passed her thanks to TEO and the Community Relations Council for having the vision and confidence to look beyond these shores and connecting with many other agencies in the United States which clearly all have so much to bring to the table and so much to share.

She thanked delegates in Boston for taking the time to join the Forum and contribute to the programme; but also equal thanks to all local contributors for everything they have done in terms of improving community relations both within and between the communities here. MoN emphasised that everyone has a role to play, and between us all there is a wealth of knowledge and expertise that we can to the betterment of our people, and it was hugely beneficial to learn from each other.

The focus at the Forum was about the children and young people, and it is imperative that we continue to invest in them. Peace building is certainly a journey and children, and young people are the future generations, and they are the peace builders of tomorrow, so they have to be the focus of all of our efforts. From the perspective of our own T:BUC strategy this means continuing to improve attitudes amongst young people and building a community where they can play a full and active part and have a say in their future and what happens around them.

MoN was pleased that progress continues to be made and stated that this progress should continue to be built upon. The programme is expanding into other areas: south Belfast and Lurgan and Portadown - with hugely successful ambassadors across the programme for which we are grateful.

MoN wished everyone the very best for all the work that they are engaged in and hoped that the collaboration and learning from each other would continue.

GJ thanked the Ministers for their opening remarks and for joining attendees this afternoon. He highlighted that the Minister's involvement in proceedings was always welcomed by the audience.

GJ reiterated that this was a very special meeting of the Engagement Forum, and the Forum was delighted to be joined by a number of individuals and organisations from Boston, Massachusetts - all involved in community work. He noted, historically,

there has always been a connection between the Civil Service NI, the Kennedy School of Government and Boston College.

GJ explained that the programme for the day was longer than usual, which would allow delegates to make the most of what was a very exciting opportunity. He provided an overview of those contributing to the Forum:

- Paul Narain, new US Consul General.
- Bill Evans, Executive Director of Public Safety and Chief of Police, Boston College, who will giving the keynote speech.
- AJ & Rachel – two young people from Belfast whose lives have been significantly changed for the better through T:BUC.

Perhaps most importantly there will be a chance to dig deeper into the work of these groups to share learning from your own experience and initiate some learning which could last beyond Zoom.

GJ then welcomed Eamonn McConville from the NI Bureau in Washington to set things in a little more context the ongoing work from the States.

Eamonn McConville, Deputy Director, NI Bureau in Washington D.C.

EMc described the role of the NI Bureau in Washington DC. He explained that the Bureau works with a wide range of political, economic, cultural, and academic organisations and that the core of their work is promoting Northern Ireland as a modern, innovative, and diverse place that people want to visit and to do business with.

Northern Ireland's relationship with the United States goes back many generations when our forefathers left our shores to make a new life in America, and since then Northern Ireland has enjoyed sustained support and goodwill from the United States and none more so with that in the period leading up to the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement.

EMc explained that the NI Executive was formed as a result of that agreement, and it is an Executive that reflects the broad spectrum of political opinion within Northern Ireland.

The Executive has taken forward a transformative programme of work which has seen Northern Ireland become a world leader in sectors such as cyber security, fintech and advanced manufacturing. It is a place that is attracting visitors to experience wonderful scenery and our warm hospitality, and a place for students from all over the world to study in our two world class universities, Queen's University Belfast, and the Ulster University.

Alongside these successes and arguably underpinning them is the huge amount of work that is going on under the Executive's Together Building United Communities

Strategy which develops good relations across all parts of the community as the key to building a prosperous, peaceful, and safe society, enriched by diversity, and is welcoming to all.

EMc wished everyone a good and informative day and passed over to Paul Narain.

Paul Narain, US Consul General

PN explained to the Forum that he had just begun a three-year diplomatic assignment as US consul general in Northern Ireland. He said he had received a warm and hospitable welcome from everyone in the community.

PN extended his own appreciation to the First and deputy First Ministers and said it was an honour and a privilege to join the delegates that afternoon.

PN applauded the work of the Executive and the Community Relations Council for convening the Forum noting that, in his role as Consul General, he still had so much to learn about Northern Ireland and his goal was to engage with as many people in the community as he could and to learn much more about the work undertaken.

PN reaffirmed the United States' support for Northern Ireland's economic, political, and social progress and wanted to be clear that critical stability is a prerequisite for foreign direct investment, economic progress including US direct investment which could provide young people the promise of a career and bright future.

The Forum heard that societal progress makes people want to stay and not to take their expertise overseas. PN explained that building up this community is a shared goal. \$600 million in contributions to the International Fund for Ireland has brought significant support to communities all across the region which can empower people and improve the quality of life in their communities and neighbourhoods.

PN explained that many exchange programmes serve to make strategic connections and to help those who are helping others. He said that Northern Ireland was a fantastic place to live and visit, and a place to do business.

The United States has played its role, but they would never seek to draw attention from the achievements of local leaders.

PG concluded that Northern Ireland is an inspiration to the wider world and the transatlantic connections that have been established are beneficial to all.

GJ thanked Paul Narain for taking the time to attend the Forum and wished him well in his new role.

For the Keynote address, GJ did not think it was any exaggeration to say that in Bill's role of Commissioner of the Boston Police Department he transformed relationships within Boston's communities and said delegates were excited to learn about his experiences.

Bill Evans - Keynote Address, Boston Police College

BE thanked everyone for including him in this great event. He thanked the US Consul General, the First and deputy First Ministers and Community Relations Council for helping make the keynote address a reality. BE thanked Boston College and explained that he had been in policing for 41 years; thirty-eight of them with the Boston Police Department and three years in Boston College.

BE was brought up in Boston, where he still lives raising his children. South Boston has a rich tradition of having a large Irish community; the St Patrick's Day parade is probably the biggest day in the community.

BE visited Belfast three years ago to talk about community building. He explained he usually talks about where he came from and growing up in a poor, working-class neighbourhood in Boston. His mother died when he was just an infant, he lost a brother and father by the time he was fourteen. A local priest stepped into BE's life and afterward he started to attend a good high school. He shared that it was an opportunity of a lifetime and shaped who he is. BE said that the community supported him as he grew up and that has shaped his philosophy on policing and how important community can be.

BE has had a lot of challenges in his career. For example, the Boston Marathon bombing. BE had just finished the race itself before the bomb detonated and for the next five days was the chief of patrol and his role was to find out who was responsible.

BE told delegates that he has always had a passion for community relations and especially bringing the police closer to the black community and building effective relationships. BE worked with others to develop programmes such as Police Walk, wherein three or four times a week he would walk with Mayor Walsh through Boston's deprived neighbourhoods building relationships.

Another initiative was to bring policing into schools, not as a deterrent, but so that young children could get to know and respect the police. BE hired an ice cream truck for the community, he established local Zumba classes, a Father's Day march for the black community, women's tennis programmes and soccer leagues.

One initiative, which would be spoken about more in a later presentation, was the introduction of social workers in police stations so that young people are not brought into a criminal justice setting.

Rev Mark Scott is one of the most avid advocates to stop violence in Boston. For example, if a troubled young child was heading down the wrong path and might get involved in gangs, Mark and his team can intervene, and that programme was very successful. Furthermore, Rev Mark Scott is also in charge of the trauma response team in Boston, e.g., a homicide scene. Rev Mark comes and talks to any young children who might have been impacted by the violence on the streets.

BE was happy to say that over his five years in the city he has built up some great community relationships. The Police reduced crime by 25%, but the most important thing was to reduce arrests by 25%, not by locking people up, but by lifting people up through the use of dialogue. Throughout the eleven police districts in Boston, the youth would come in and speak to the police to talk about what is on their mind.

In closing, BE said after 38 years in the BPD, he joined Boston College and continues to help in any way he can but the whole idea of community building, which is what the Forum is all about, is that people want to trust in their institutions especially in their police and there is no way better to do that than with the youth, because they are needed to work in partnership.

Finally, BE shared that when he last visited NI he went to an integrated school. He explained that living in Boston integration usually referred to 'black' and 'white' and was therefore surprised by the religious differences in the school; integration in Belfast is a lot different than integration in America. There are a lot of the same differences and similarities, but the point is to try new initiatives, to think outside the box on ways to bring children and institutions together.

BE thanked the organisers for inviting him and said he looked forward to sitting in and listening to the speakers.

GJ thanked Bill Evans for a provoking speech and for his affirmation of what we have to offer in the community on this side of the Atlantic, highlighting that early interventions and diversionary work with young people in NI is key.

GJ introduced AJ and Rachel to talk about their personal story and prospects delivered through T:BUC.

AJ and Rachel – PeacePlayers, Northern Ireland

AJ – Thanked GJ for the introduction and briefly explained the role of PeacePlayers and how she and Rachel met.

PeacePlayers is an organisation that uses sport to unite, educate and inspire young people across Northern Ireland and the globe.

AJ grew up in the Ardoyne interface side and attended a protestant primary school. AJ explained that she and Rachel, while living in two very different communities, were living very similar lives. She said it was strange to think that she and Rachel never would have met if it was not for PeacePlayers.

AJ told delegates that she is a PeacePlayers Coach and that she and Rachel came through the coach's programme together.

Rachel introduced herself and reiterated that she would not have met AJ had it not been for the PeacePlayers initiative. She said they were both coaches and as she had just graduated from university, she was now hoping to work in the community and primary schools to help in deliver programmes over Northern Ireland.

Rachel and AJ showed a previously recorded video: <https://youtu.be/wiGBsWE5fl>

The video showed scenes from Belfast in the early 2000s when there was trouble in the middle of two primary schools located on either side of the Catholic and Protestant interface in Ardoyne.

AJ and Rachel provided some background about their lives and how they met, aged ten, through PeacePlayers.

The video showed how two girls with very similar backgrounds held negative opinions about the 'other side' which were soon overcome.

They explained that PeacePlayers was a programme for young people from different backgrounds and different traditions to come together to develop relationships and friendships.

GJ thanked AJ and Rachel on their very much personal story and emphasised that T:BUC initiatives are not meant as a one off but to create connections and relationships.

Q&A

GJ – My question is what is the next? What is it you are going to be doing?

AJ – My thing is always looking forward to the year ahead and inspiring another group of kids coming through the programme. We have another group to motivate, another group to make ripples with, another group of kids to get buy in to run with the programme, just as we did because we have seen the effects of it. It's all well and good you can be a coach and can stand up and be like 'this is great let's do this' we are authentic, 100% genuine, because we

are products of PeacePlayers. We are ready to go in north Belfast and across Northern Ireland for this year, especially because it's in person. We are working on JCCL that I created actually on my internship, so I think it's get ready to make AJ and Rachel's 2.0 – bigger, better, more experienced.

GJ introduced the Community Based Sessions. He thanked all the speakers from the first session and handed over to Chris Gardner, TEO to Chair the second session.

Community Based Sessions

Purpose: To draw on the shared experience and the shared learning of community-based activity taking place in US and NI and highlight key aspects and attributes of successful project delivery when dealing with conflict or contested issues.

Presentation 1: YouthLink – Gordon Woolsey, TRANSFORM Project Coordinator

Gareth shared a PowerPoint Presentation on screen.

GW introduced himself as Project Coordinator of Transform Project, a funded position that he has held for the last three years. Prior to this, GE worked in Oasis, an organisation which primarily works with disadvantaged BME children and young people. Another voluntary role GW holds is Chairperson of Scotch Street community centre, an organisation that works with over 300 children and young people from Protestant, Catholic and BME communities.

GW explained that YouthLink was established in 1991 as a collaborative partnership of the four larger churches in Ireland; Presbyterian; Methodist; Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church. It exists to provide support and training for youth workers and community relations experiences for young people. The organisation delivers a comprehensive programme involving young people, young adults, and young practitioners. Training covers a range of disciplines including youth leadership community relations, citizenship, peace and reconciliation, organisational policy and strategy, and resources to support the development of programmes.

YouthLink was established as a church's response to the conflict and at a time when continuing atrocities and loss of life were a daily occurrence it was set up support young people, peace building and reconciliation programmes, it also to provides support and resources to church-based youth work on a local level.

The organisation is located in a purpose designed training resource centre on the Springfield Road in Belfast, an interface area in West Belfast. YouthLink relies on a funding from a number of organisations including the Community Relation Council (CRC), TEO, the Education Authority, the Department of Education, and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

YouthLink's vision is of churches working together to build excellence in youth work and ministry towards a just, peaceful, and flourishing society based on the common good. The organisation seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and peaceful society enabling young people and youth workers to build positive, healthy, and sustainable relationships within and between communities, free education training and empowerment programmes.

GW explained that YouthLink also seek to build capacity and excellence in all aspects of youth work practise through the provision of quality training for young people and adult volunteers, as well providing professional development and training of youth workers.

YouthLink has four key areas of work; a degree programme – today there are 163 graduates who have successfully completed the programme since its inception in 2000

Peace and reconciliation are at the core of YouthLink's work, they seek to promote positive, sustainable relationships.

GW handed over to Aoibhin McAuley to show a video illustrating Helena's journey.

[Part 1 - OneDrive \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Presentation 2: Roca Inc – Molly Baldwin, CEO and Chiantia Mack

CM explained that at ROCA they believe that no young person is lost even when they have lost all hope and trust for themselves.

The population that ROCA currently serve are at critical risk due to the ongoing exposure of complex trauma, grief, incarceration, substance use disorder, and the threat of early death.

ROCA had to get specific on their target population in a very short time. They had a combination of mixed age groups and young people that were at risk who would benefit from prevention programmes such as school programmes, early intervention programmes and mentorships and structures that were able to get them back on track. ROCA work with specifically young people, and annually serves 1,000 men and 254 young mothers.

MB said she was honoured to be here with her colleague and explained that there were a couple of key issues that MB wanted to highlight.

ROCA's focus is on young people that do not show up; they are not going to youth leadership programmes and not going to school and so ROCA have to work with that

group - which is a different piece of work than the group of people who are going to show up.

MB explained that to understand trauma and determine trauma-informed responses you need to go to the group that is the hardest to reach. You need to spend more time out there with them than you are waiting for them to come in.

She said another piece that is important is the difference between prevention work and early intervention work. If you look at the stages of behaviour change, harm reduction is a really helpful last look at those young people.

MB said that if a person is struggling with drug issues and historical trauma that is influencing a newer group and you have got some groups of young people just not connecting - she has to look for different approaches. The other key lesson ROCA has learned is really how do you find partners to work with you to wrap around the group that is not engaging. MS explained that ROCA is not here to teach about youth leadership but noted the incredible peace-making work done is just phenomenal.

MB apologised for running out of time.

Q&A

CG for ROCA - as you work in two different areas geographically, have you had to adapt your approach?

MB replied - so we've been involved in Maryland for three years. In a few months there is more violence in the city of Baltimore than the entire state of Massachusetts, so the biggest adaptation is really safety on steroids. We have a very specific set of interventions we're working with. Young people carrying guns are most likely to shoot or be shot. There are very high-risk situations, but in Baltimore (population of about 600,000 and declining) there's an average of one murder per day and anywhere from three to nine non-fatal shootings a day, so the safety issues for young people and staff had to be dramatically adapted. We we've been learning about the CBT and adapting our current behaviour theory over the past few years, getting it very frontline user friendly, highly mobile, adapted to all kinds of environments. We are clear that the outreach to the mall over and over and over and over again with trauma and I think this is highly applicable to kind of where the group, as I understand from Chris and Peter's discussion, and some of our other friends there, that's most out there you know behaviours really impacted by trauma and the good news is you can change your brain but it takes time and 16 to 24 year olds you're looking about 18 to 24 months for any singular behaviour change, so any effort in education for engagement for employment are really about opportunities to help these young people develop the emotional, regulation skills to understand what they think, feel and do are different and

once they can learn to take an 8 to 12 second pause they can then have agency to choose what they're doing as opposed to react

CG to MG– Can you talk a little bit more about your intervention Model in terms of how you recruit for your programme. How do you find these individuals?

MG to CG – ROCA hang up flyers around. Where these young people who are in-between arrest, they all have felony charges in court they are blowing probation. So, we get young people different ways; referrals from police probation in Baltimore; because the non-fatal shootings are so high, we get a list everyday of non-fatal shooting victims of our age group, we see if we know them or not and then we go try to find where they are and knock on the door or find him in a hospital bed. We often just get names and addresses and they may or may not be right, so we have to go at this a number of ways.

Presentation 3: Boys and Girls Club of Boston – YouthConnect- Adrienne Wallace Lawrence, Executive Director

YouthConnect is a programme of collaboration between the Boys and Girls Club of Boston and the Boston Police Department. AWL explained that officers have only so many options when they see a young person in trouble. Historically we know what that option has been – ‘So what?’.

YouthConnect see that the history of trauma and instability attachment disorders lead to young people engaging in criminalised behaviour, so traditionally the option has been for officers to put those young folks in a detention centre to arrest them, to bring formal charges and obviously that hasn't worked with respect to the reduction of violence.

AWL said that officers see a young person in trouble and do not get any joy from putting that young person in a cage, so YouthConnect use connectors to place social workers in those police departments that tend to have the highest incidence of crime. Those Social Workers provide all of those things to interrupt the systems of trauma, poverty, and mass incarceration by actually providing not just therapy but also material support and resource management to address the concerns and to prevent further participation and behaviour that has been criminalised.

AWL wanted to highlight why YouthConnect's model works well. Eighty percent of the families that YouthConnect reach out to, whether it's from a police referral (which are the majority of their role) from a school or from another programme, opt into services. YouthConnect do not charge for services, they do not bill for insurance; there are no barriers.

AWL explained that YouthConnect talk about that initial relationship and the relationship moving forward, and while that sounds simple, it is, but it is also challenging.

Presentation 4: Irish Football Association – Connect Programme

Chris Wright, Community Relations Officer

CW thanked the Community Relations Council.

The idea of the Connect Programme in the context of a Pandemic changed; all previous work would have been face to face, so IFA had to adapt all their programmes to online delivery work.

What CW found in the community relations area was that he had to figure out how to connect the community. He wanted to introduce a good relations football education programme, so he tried to use football as a hook for opportunities and lifelong participation within sport.

Through community relations CW realised that not everyone loves football, but we can offer various pathway within the game for example, media training, refereeing, coaching, and returning to play.

IFA piloted a programme with various communities based around their central offices and Windsor Park. The programme ran for 8 weeks, with a different module each week, e.g., mental health and disability training. The aim was to try and give a holistic feel for the work the IFA undertake on a daily basis, pre pandemic. The group from week one came together and got on well. So much so that the IFA decided to continue to work with the participants in ambassadorial roles.

CW went through the presentation and showed some photos of the programmes currently being delivered online by IFA across the region.

CW showed a video showing the Summer Connect Programme.

Tony Dorrian introduced himself and explained his role as an IFA Ambassador. This role gives him a sense of pride and it is something that he feels is an excellent opportunity for young people across both communities. TD explained that he got to meet people through the Programme that lived very close to him but, due to a different background and divisions, he never would have met them in 'real life'. He has made lasting friendship, relationships, and connections through the programme. TD said that the programme had given him conviction as well encouraged him to participate in something following a long lockdown.

CW showed another video of the Pilot Scheme Programme attended by TD.

Both videos are available from the IFA website or searching IFA Connect Programme.

Q&A

Q – With the use of the digital technology, was it easier to ask the difficult questions than it would be face to face?

CW – no, not necessarily. I think it's very much dependent on the group, but I would say for example that if young people don't want the turn on the camera they just simply will not be on film, or they will be sharing one phone, sitting together with the camera off. But no, not easier, just much the same as when its face to face.

Presentation 5: Operation Homefront – Rev Mark Scott, Director Division of Violence Protection, Boston Department of Public Health

MS introduced himself as Associate Pastor of the Azusa Christian community. He also serves as the Coordinator for Homefront, which has been running since 1998, and works during the day in the division of violence prevention. He will be speaking primarily about his role as a member of the clergy and home visitation collaboration for youths in trouble. He wished participants Happy International Day of Peace and quoted 'if peace is not happening, build it'.

MS is very influenced by working in public health. For four years he was programme director for the neighbourhood trouble teen network.

MS explained that Boston Police are now in Boston public schools as a support for students, known as safety officers. These roles are being reimaged as a support network for the students and not a 'policing role'. The school policing unit in Boston is a small, plain clothes unit of police officers. The officers are very diverse in terms of origin and gender, with multiple language skills and they tend to have the skills to interact and work with young people.

MS described how the unit, once they have received a referral from the police, visit parents and students in their home to discuss the issue/concern that got them into trouble at school and to brainstorm ideas to support the families and replace the negative action with a positive action. At these home visits, the police do not undertake searches, there are no arrests and also there is limited bible study and prayer. MS added that while they do not visit the family or student to pray, there are times when the parent has asked for prayer, which can be very important for the family in those moments.

MS noted the support he has received from parents. MS was concerned that parents would be concerned at having a home visit or be sceptical about the help being

offered, however they have been welcoming and supportive. When meeting with the family the unit give advice and guidance, or they make a referral to the Girls and Boys Club.

MS spoke about the Girls and Boys Club and the great work they are doing in schools with the introduction of social workers. He gave an example of meeting with a Muslim student shortly after 9/11 and the barriers that came with it. It was suggested the student should meet with an imam rather than a Christian leader. An imam joined the team and was able to meet with the family, in a respectful manner, to establish and address the student's issues.

MS also wanted to pay tribute to Saint Mother Janet Boone.

MS shared a Boston Globe article on screen about the work of his unit, as well as a link to an article on the reduction of violence in Boston.

Presentation 6: T:BUC Planned Interventions Programme

Gavin King, Head of Good Relations, The Executive Office and Stephen Hughes, St Peter's Youth Centre.

GK introduced himself and gave an overview of his role before handing over to Stephen Hughes from St Peter's who would provide some specific examples of the programme of delivery.

GK explained that the planned intervention programmes funds community activity to support young people away from antisocial and other negative activities particular during periods of heightened tension.

GK noted that earlier in the session, Chianta Mack from ROCA Inc had mentioned the of ethos of 'no young person should be left behind' - a shared ethos of the Planned Interventions Programme - which provides alternatives for young people who would be at risk of being left behind or engaging in negative behaviour.

In the last 4-years TEO has provided over £1.4 million in funding to the programme and this has enabled over 350 interventions. The latest available data shows that 99% of young people involved in the programme stated that it had improved their confidence and developed new skills. Seventy-four percent of participant indicated that now felt more favourably about peers from other backgrounds.

The Ministers at the beginning of the Forum provided a wider context of some of the challenge due to the pandemic. GK's programme has had challenges also e.g., using technology to communicate remotely and working with smaller groups of young people.

GK introduced **Stephen Hughes** from St Peter's Youth Club. He said that Stephen has been working as a senior youth worker for 8 years and he has a tremendous amount of experience, specifically working with hard to reach and at-risk young people.

SH introduced himself and explained that he worked in St Peter's Youth Centre in Divis, on the Falls Road, a significant interface community with a notorious history.

SH showed slides depicting the conflict in Belfast, noting the area has been plagued by social, economic, political, and sectarian violence for many years.

SH explained some of the things that people won't know regarding gang related activity in the community. He said car crime was notorious and YouTube holds thousands and thousands of videos of car crime in the community.

SH said that the Youth Centre does not show negative imagery of children and young people.

SH shared a video with attendees.

[Part 2 - OneDrive \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

SH explained that gangs vie for control over the communities, some involved in CSE and more importantly add romanticism and radicalisation of the civil conflict.

The Divis and Falls area is one of the most economically deprived in Northern Ireland crime. The Youth Centre runs an exclusion policy, and everything is about the young person first, framed by the Human Rights Commission, the one that sets the Centre apart from everywhere else is that no matter what a young person has done or involved with, whether its interface violence, or sectarian attacks, it is seen as a learning opportunity.

SH shared that he worked with participants back in 2010 in the United States. He has adapted the Big Mac model of followership models which is about tackling that romanticism.

Along with the Department for Foreign Affairs, Belfast City Council and the Community Relations Council the Centre runs a junior ambassadors programme which has helped 12–15-year-olds become ambassadors. There is also a planned intervention summer programme with funding which enables the Centre to work with target groups of young people

Some of the other important work undertaken is the reduction in recruitment and radicalisation of young people surrounding bonfires. They aim to keep the young people occupied, keeping them away from crime and as an organisation they want those young people to grow and develop through learning opportunities.

SH thanked the delegates and organisers for the opportunity to speak.

Closing Remarks from Richard Cushnie, The Executive Office

RC introduced himself as the Director for Good Relations working along with Chris Gardner and some of the other colleagues here today.

RC noted the contributions of the speakers as amazing, inspirational, engaging, fun and challenging. In terms of some of those things, RC said we needed to do more in respect of youth leadership, communications on funding, but also in terms of some of the successes that have been had.

RC thanked everyone for engaging. He thanked the speakers, the contributors, and the audience for engaging on the various issues. He noted it had been a longer session than normal which stretched the practicalities of Zoom, but it had been a great opportunity to bring all these issues together.

RC wanted to make a few final points before ending the session. One of the core messages from his last role in Washington was promoting Northern Ireland overseas and promoting excellence at home. Good relations work was a brilliant example of that excellence, and it has been great to share that work with a wider audience. One of the objectives of the Bureau was the sense that we are sometimes too close to our own pressures and problems to see them clearly and the Forum had demonstrated for colleagues in the US what has been achieved. He said the relationship with the United States has been important for Northern Ireland for a long time; further that this event was another example of how that relationship with the United States can continue.

Finally, RC wanted to single out a few people, in particular Peter Day at the CRC, for making it all work and setting up this event in the first place, and his colleague Chris Gardner who deserved huge credit. The event had been Chris's idea and demonstrates huge energy and drive.

RC thanked his good friend Bob Mauro from Boston College, without whom this event would not have taken place. Bob had given generously of his time and contacts to make it all happen so hopefully the event has opened new conversations and ideas that can be built upon.

RC closed the Forum, thanking presenters and attendees.

Event ended at 6 p.m.