

Towards Understanding and Healing

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

AUTUMN 2005

Quarterly Newsletter

Visit our website: www.thejunction-ni.org/towardsunderstandingandhealing.htm

Staff:

Keli Harrington,
Coordinator

Nikki D'Adamo,
Projects & Outreach

Denise McDaid,
Administrator

Management Committee:

Maureen
Hetherington,
Co-chairperson

Jim O'Neill,
Co-chairperson

Eamonn Deane

Michael Doherty

Owen Donnelly
Seamas Heaney

John Lindsay

Frances McAneny

Brigid McElroy

Richard Moore

Hugh Rowan

Martin Snoddon

TUH
The Junction
8 Bishop St.
Derry/Londonderry
BT48 6PW

TEL: 44 28 7137 0685
FAX: 44 28 7126 4641

When the Fighting Stops...the Dialogue Continues

Before September of last year, Chris Lyttle and Stephen Donaghey had never had the opportunity to meet—Stephen is the Peer Support Worker for the Old Library Trust in Derry, while Chris was a volunteer youth worker at the youth drop-in centre at the Christian Fellowship Church, Strandtown in East Belfast. Little did they expect that the 2004 When the Fighting Stops conference would change that, and set the stage for positive interaction between both men and their youth.

"I first meet Chris at your conference in September 2004 we had a few conversations regarding the differences of opinion within workshops..." says Stephen. "...I felt he was open and understanding to the diversity of our respective communities."

Chris explains, "At the conference we realized we represented an opportunity to attempt to bring young people from Derry and East Belfast together, and of course ourselves, an opportunity not encountered every day

in Northern Ireland."

The two were committed to bringing their youth together, and when they met again at The Talking Citizenship conference, they discussed developments since the September conference, exchanged email addresses, and arranged visits to discuss an exchange. Eventually, Stephen and the OLT invited Chris to facilitate a workshop where young people from Derry and Donegal embarked on an exploration of Identity.

(Continued on page 4)

Upcoming Events

Storytelling Residentials

These storytelling residentials are for both men and women in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain who have been affected by the Troubles.

7–9 November 2005

Lusty Beg Island

2–4 December 2005

Lusty Beg Island

20–22 January 2006

Contact Keli or Nikki for more information.

**Due to high demand, TUH must now give preference to individuals who have never attended TUH storytelling events.*

Past participants who wish to attend again are invited to place their names on a waiting list, in the event that a space becomes available.

Dynamic Memory *(excerpts from *Storytelling in Northern Ireland*, by Stuart Mullan)*

Some of you may remember Stuart from the July dialogue event. Here are a few outtakes from his thesis that we thought you might find interesting...

In the transition towards peace, society must attempt to come to terms with the horror and brutality of conflict. Communities that were traditionally alienated from each other...are beginning to ask questions about their role, both personally and as a group, in the conflict, and their responsibility to those that they perceive as 'other' in securing lasting peace. As has been seen in other countries emerging from similar periods of conflict, such as Chile or South Africa, questions of truth, justice, history and story are of vital importance. All parties to the conflict, including those within society who do not consider themselves as having been involved directly in perpetrating violence, must face challenging questions about their role in the conflict, if they wish to contribute to the process of reconciliation...

In pursuing the question of the power and relevance of storytelling as a dynamic of reconciliation, it is first important to examine the nature of storytelling itself and unpack some of the dynamics concerning how we remember and tell our own stories. Storytelling has always played a significant part in Irish society, acting as the vehicle through which history and tradition were passed down in communities where levels of literacy were low. Storytelling was not therefore viewed as solely the work of fiction, but was a method of accurately transmitting history from generation to generation....

It is clear that both memory and story play a crucial role in the reconciliation process. The ways in which communities in conflict tell the story of the conflict, and the identity of themselves and those they are in conflict with, has a profound effect on their capacity to make the transition out of violent conflict into peace. Brewer describes these collective memories (also known as community memories) as 'group memories shared by a community that help to bind that community together'.

Sociologists have wrestled with developing theories of memory that account for the conflicts that groups experience when recalling past events to mind. French sociologist Emile Durkheim argued that the function of remembering was not to 'transform the past but to promote a commitment to the group by symbolising its values and aspirations'. Social memories also relate to group identity, they are the stories we tell ourselves to remind us that we are the same, that we are together, and that we must remain together. Maurice Halbwachs extended Durkheim's thinking, and proposed that individuals 'only remember what society tells them is worthy to be remembered'. Memory therefore is a social, and not purely an individual enterprise, and individuals do not possess the autonomy to remember in isolation, outside of the political control of the state...

The Dynamics of Memory approach seeks to understand memory less as a method of constructing control, or seeking to homogenize society, rather collective memory is 'an ongoing process of negotiation' and illustrates 'limits to the power of actors in the present to re-make the past according to their own interests'.

The narrative dimensions to memory are drawn out in the dynamics of memory approach, as it is 'less interested in commemorative practices as stabilising memory and reproducing the group's cohesion'; rather it focuses on activities of recollection as the 'act of establishing a relationship with some event issue, or entity of the past'. Memory is viewed as an internal conversation, both conscious and unconscious, which individuals and groups discuss internally and externally as they locate themselves within the present past, that is the story of who they are, as they now understand that story in the present.

(Continued on Page 4)

A Word From Old Friends and New...

Dear Friends of TUH,

I am the new Projects and Outreach Officer for The Junction and TUH. Like my predecessor, Sarah Lockhart, I came to this project from the States, via the Brethren Volunteer Service. That sounds very straightforward, but like most stories, my path here has been a winding, often unpredictable road. Regardless, I'm excited to be here in Northern Ireland, and thrilled to be working with the "magic" that is TUH.

I grew up outside of Richmond, Virginia, where my family has lived for generations. It was there that I first learned the importance of stories and memories,

listening to my grandfather's tales and hearing stories of our history. In new places, I heard new stories--tales of apartheid and mini-bus wars in Cape Town, memories of burnings and marches in Selma. There was always an unexpected power in the sharing—and I am excited to be a part of a project that recognizes and uses that power to increase our awareness of one another's humanity.

Sarah left me some big shoes to fill, and I know that she has been missed here, both personally and professionally. I hope to continue her good work with TUH, utilizing my own gifts to as-



Nikki D'Adamo is the new Projects and Outreach Officer for TUH.

sist Keli, maintain our website, and publish this newsletter. I look forward to working with you and getting to know everyone. Until next time... --Nikki

Sarah Shouts From Across the Pond

Greetings from California! It has been just over two months since I returned to the States from Northern Ireland and only a few weeks since I began my new endeavour: a Ph.D. programme in Political Science at the University of California, Davis. Already I'm swamped with studying and writing papers, but I'm fascinated by what I'm learning and anxious to begin developing my own research. The city of Davis is a lovely place to live, and I'm only 30 minutes away from my parents' home, which is a welcome change from the 15-hour trip from Northern Ireland! It has been wonderful to reconnect

with family and friends here, as well as meet new people at the University. Despite getting lots of laughs with the Northern Irish vocabulary and phrases I've inadvertently picked up, and finding the Californian slang funny myself (yes, they really do say "dude" here), I'm readjusting quite well.

Still, despite my contentment here, I find myself missing Northern Ireland tremendously. I miss the rolling green hills, the pace of life, and the sense that everyone knows everyone. I even miss the dreary weather, because nothing makes one appreciate a beautiful day

more than not having one very frequently! Most of all, I miss my work at Towards Understanding and Healing. I can't imagine ever again getting to the opportunity to meet so many people that are willing to take such personal risks for peace, to share so much of themselves and be so open to others. I'll be anxious to hear how TUH progresses under the guidance of the very capable Keli and Nikki, and I hope that I can somehow, on this side of the pond, find a way to share and expand what we have all learned from our Towards Understanding and Healing experience.

Dynamic Memory (continued from page 2)

The dynamics of memory approach also offers some hope of resolution to conflicts of memory that exist between competing groups. As memory is understood as a dialogue between the past and the present, opportunities arise for reframing, or the pluralisation of memory, whereby in the dialogue space is created for alternative meanings to be ascribed to previously fixed understandings of the past. In the Irish conflict, where over 35 years of violent conflict has caused over 3700 deaths, and over 40,000 injuries, the competition to assert the 'correct' interpretation of the past creates endless possibilities for the escalation of conflict. Reliance on the...dominant understandings of memory insist that there is one fixed under-

standing of the past, and that we have come to remember this as it is because the powerful at that time gave us those memories...

The dynamics of memory approach...assert[s] that whilst memories are located in the political power structures of the past..., fortified by the traditions and rituals constructed to endorse that perspective, and that alternative memories are constructed to resist the dominant paradigm...; memory is not located in either position, but rather 'it assumes a more complex view of relation between past and present in shaping collective memory, and sees collective memory as 'an active process of making sense through time.'...

The pluralisation of mem-

ory, and the practice of intentionally creating space for a multiplicity of memories to coexist and temper one another, must be seen as central to the successful construction of a truly cooperative future. As has been demonstrated, this more nuanced understanding of the role of memory and its functions in a conflict situation, including personal, social and dialogical truths, is vital in seeking to address the conflicting views presented by competing sides.

Traditional Stories: Leonard George & Dave Abbott - May 2000

John Brewer, Forthcoming in Delanty, G and Kumark, The Handbook of Nations and Nationalism, Sage, London.

Barbara A. Misztal, Theories of Social Remembering, Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2003.

Zelizer, 1995, in Misztal, Theories of Social Remembering, 2003.

When the Fighting Stops...(continued from page 1)

Chris subsequently brought a group of his young people to engage with youth from Donegal and Derry for outdoor pursuit activities and team building exercises in Rostrevor/Warrenpoint.

The exchanges continues-- Stephen has since visited the new youth centre at Christian Fellowship Church, Strandtown and Chris has

visited the Old Library Trust in Derry. Chris says that without the September conference, none of these exchanges would have happened. "I'm sure I can speak for Stephen when I say we would extend sincere gratitude for the courageous and critical work of TUH in facilitating meaningful exchange between people in a fractured community."

We Want To Hear From You!

Do you have some news or thoughts to share with the TUH community? The newsletter is a way for all of us to keep in touch with each other. Write to Nikki via email (see right) or post (see front page).

Towards Understanding and Healing is an organisation that recognises the individual experience in the context of the larger story of conflict in Northern Ireland. TUH offers a safe space for people to begin to articulate personal stories, and also to listen to other stories or truths in a way that does not diminish their own experience.

Newsletter written & edited by:

Nikki D'Adamo
ndadamo@thejunction-ni.org

© 2005

Special Thanks to Sarah Lockhart, Stuart Mullan, Chris Lyttle, and Stephen Donaghey