Conference Report

“I hope you leave with inspiration and energy, embed Restorative Practice into our culture and have a deeper and wider vision” Prof Mary McAleese, opening speech.

1. Context
The Restorative Practices Forum (NI) (formerly the Restorative Justice Forum) has brought a wide range of people and organisations together over the past 25 years to promote restorative justice, to offer opportunities to share best practices and to support research. It can claim that it has contributed to the rapid expansion of restorative practices over the past 20 years and to Northern Ireland’s international reputation for high quality and innovative restorative approaches in a variety of sectors.

2. The Conference Planning Team
The Conference Planning Team was established as a sub-group of the Restorative Practices Forum (NI) and comprised Jim McGrath; Yvonne Adair (Chair of Planning Group); David Smyth; Janette McKnight; Tom Winstone; Christine Hunter; Tim Chapman; Martina Jordan; and David Eagleson (in order of appearance in photograph above).

The Team first met on 10th August 2018 to discuss the possibility of a conference to mark the 25th anniversary of the Forum. They then hosted a roundtable event on 11th October 2018 for statutory partners to ascertain their interest and support for such an event. Support and feedback were very encouraging, and it was agreed to go ahead and plan a 1-2-day conference in the Autumn of 2019, with an anticipated attendance of 150+.

The Team continued meeting regularly until November 2019 and have continued to meet since then to discuss and organise follow-up events.

3. Conference objectives
It was agreed that the conference would seek to:
- take stock of and celebrate what has been achieved;
- Cast a critical eye on what could be improved; and
- Generate a vision to maximise the benefits of restorative practices throughout society.

4. Who was it aimed at?
The conference provided an opportunity to bring together policy makers, practitioners and researchers from throughout the island of Ireland and to welcome visitors from Britain, Europe and beyond.

5. Event Management
Six events management companies and one individual were invited to tender to provide conference organisation and event planning services in support of the work of the RPF(NI) Conference Planning Group (tender documentation available on request). The contract was duly awarded to ND Events, 15 Market Place, Lisburn, BT28 1AN at a cost of £4k.

The Conference Planning Group was impressed with the level of service provided by ND Events who carried out all duties specified within the contract to a high-quality standard.

6. Conference report
The electronic report, soon available on the Quaker Service website (www.quakerservice.com), includes the programme, photographs, presentations, summary workshop report, and a summary of the evaluation forms received.

At least 155 people attended the conference from a wide range of organisations and sectors from across Ireland, Scotland, Europe, Canada and Australia. A list of these is attached at Appendix 1.

7. Speakers
The conference was chaired by:
- Paul Clark MBE

The opening welcome given via video by:
- Professor Mary McAleese (former President of Ireland)
The opening speakers were:
- Sir Declan Morgan, Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland
- Janette McKnight, Chair of RPF(NI)
- Simon Byrne, Chief Constable, Police Service NI
- Cheryl Lamont, Chief Executive, Probation Board NI
- Brendan McGuigan, Chief Inspector, Criminal Justice Inspectorate NI
- Paul Doran, Director of Rehabilitation, Department of Justice
- Debbie Watters, Co-Director, NI Alternatives and Vice Chair, NI Policing Board
- Harry Maguire, Chief Executive, Community Restorative Justice Ireland

1st day plenary speakers were:
- Professor Jennifer Llewellyn, Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia
- Professor Gillean McCluskey, University of Edinburgh
- Maire Thompson, Principal, Hazelwood Integrated College
- Jim McGrath, Director, Netcare NI

2nd day plenary speakers were:
- Geri Hanna, Chief Executive, Victim Support NI
- Marie Keenan, University College Dublin
- Tim Chapman, Chair, European Forum for Restorative Justice
- Steven McCourt, Head of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reducing Reoffending, Department of Justice

2nd day keynote speaker:
Professor John Braithwaite, founder of RegNet, Australian National University

8. Workshops - key action points
21 workshops were organised, each co-facilitated by practitioners and experts across a wide range of restorative approaches including youth conferencing, adults, probation, prisons, family & parenting, training & development, victims, schools & education, communities, intimate partner violence, desistance, hate crime & prejudice, harmful sexual behaviour, problem solving courts, government departments, legislation and restorative enquiries.

Workshop facilitators were provided with guidelines for each workshop and rapporteurs were appointed to record action points from each workshop.

The following summary outlines the key action points arising from the workshops which will provide the basis for the ongoing work of the Restorative Practice Forum (NI) 2020-2022.

- **SOCIETY** In order to build a strong inclusive NI community, Restorative Practice (RP) approaches/principles should be more fully integrated into a range of issues/sectors. This should include community, education, training, justice, social work/care, health and government. The Forum and conference delegates will seek to use their influence as appropriate. In order to be transformative, RP requires more collaborative approaches across sectors and departments. Pilot projects, evaluations, research and the engagement of the public/volunteers in RP approaches should be utilised.
• **EDUCATION** In order to ensure stronger school communities and (for example) prevent school exclusions (when possible), the Education Department should integrate restorative values/approaches in primary and post primary sectors, including appropriate staff training and a consistent and evaluated approach. The RP Forum NI will host a discussion seminar in this respect.

• **FAMILY/PARENTING** Restorative approaches in parenting and family issues, including Family Group Conferencing should be integrated into Social Work and other relevant training and service delivery, in order to utilise working with service users, to build their capacity to successfully manage conflict and challenge in relationships.

• **JUSTICE** RP should be made more available to support victims who should have more formal opportunity to instigate a restorative process. In Adult cases, RP should be prioritised for prevention/diversion in lower level issues/cases (in collaboration with Community and Third sectors). The Forum will continue to work with and lobby the DOJ to take forward the Centre for Restorative Excellence.

• **GENDER BASED VIOLENCE** The RP Forum (NI) will host a showing of ‘The Meeting’, followed by a panel discussion, in order to build on the Conference address by Marie Keenan on the possibilities of RP in respect of gender-based violence.

9. **Other observations from the conference**
   - ALL justice is LOCAL - bespoke, grassroots and must be sustainable
   - Must be OUTCOME FOCUSED
   - Important to show COURAGE, take a RISK
   - Needs to be MAINSTREAM - not just a tool in the box, but a way of thinking
   - Legislative base important, but also, the mindset
   - Aim HIGH, lift our game, be AMBITIOUS
   - Respect, Relationships, Responsibilities - importance of truth and sincerity
   - Community Based Restorative Justice groups and other 3rd sector organisations kept us honest
   - Resources - can be reallocated, rearranged - 'bottom slice' what isn’t working!
   - Change the memory card
   - VICTIM initiated - we have no right to withhold
   - Nothing worth doing in human endeavour is risk free….but training, experience and commitment/belief is essential
   - Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like… START in schools
   - Overuse of traditional Criminal Justice can ‘blunt the sword’ - RJ a better delivery vehicle - more challenging? / better outcomes?
   - Extend NI system to adults - look forward to proposed strategy.

10. **Funding received**
    The Restorative Practices Forum (NI) would like to thank our funders for the financial support without which we would not have been able to deliver this event. (In alphabetical order):

BCC Good Relations
Department of Justice NI
Health & Social Care Board
11. Event cost
The event cost a total of **£21.9k**

12. Conference fees
The Planning Team agreed the delegate fee structure set out below. A 35% reduced rate was made available to students and 3rd Sector Organisation staff (up to a total of 30 people) with a maximum of 2 from each organisation. There were also complementary places given to people carrying out a significant role at the conference. Those booking via Eventbrite were subject to an additional handling fee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration Type (please select)</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full conference</td>
<td>£120.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full conference (reduced rate)</td>
<td>£78.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 1 of conference</td>
<td>£80.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 1 of conference (reduced rate)</td>
<td>£52.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 2 of conference</td>
<td>£45.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 2 of conference (reduced rate)</td>
<td>£29.25</td>
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It was agreed to use any surplus (from delegate fees) to enable delivery of follow up events.

13. Evaluation
Evaluation forms were provided to all delegates who were requested to complete these before leaving. Of 155 delegates in attendance over the 2 days, 36 forms were returned representing a 23% response rate. Please refer to Appendix 2 for the evaluation report.

14. Media focus
The event was widely Tweeted, and The Irish News printed an article following the event. The journal “Quakers in Criminal Justice” also included an article across the middle spread in their Winter 2019 issue.

15. Ongoing Professional Development
Social Workers were able to obtain PiP credits from the Social Care Council and Solicitors were eligible for CPD points from the Law Society.

16. Next steps
The Planning Group continues to meet and is currently planning an event to celebrate International Restorative Justice Week in November 2020 to further explore the use of restorative practice after gender-based violence.

Juanette McKnight
Restorative Practices Forum NI
February 2020
**Appendix 1**

*List of Organisations represented by Conference Delegates*

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<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Action For Children</td>
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<td>An Garda Siochana</td>
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<td>Archways - Blue Skies Initiative</td>
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<td>Armagh City, Banbridge &amp; Craigavon Borough Council</td>
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<td>Barnardos</td>
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<td>Belvedere Youth Club</td>
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<td>Blaney</td>
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<td>Carrickfergus YMCA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childhood Development Initiative</td>
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<td>Colaiste Feirste</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>Community Justice Scotland</td>
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<td>Community Restorative Justice Ireland</td>
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<td>Department of Justice</td>
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<td>Donegal ETB</td>
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<td>Dublin City Council</td>
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<td>Early Learning Initiative</td>
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<td>Education Authority</td>
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<td>Extern</td>
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<td>Facing Forward</td>
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<td>FGCNI</td>
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<td>Hazelwood Integrated College</td>
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<td>ICRC</td>
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<td>Independent</td>
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<td>Irish FA Foundation</td>
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<td>Judiciary</td>
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<td>Oakgrove Integrated College</td>
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<td>Republic of Estonia Social Insurance Board</td>
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<td>Saint Mary's University</td>
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<td>Scoilmhuirebuncrana</td>
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<td>Sodexo Justice Services</td>
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<td>South Belfast Roundtable/Get Real NIACRO</td>
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<td>Sperrin Cultural Awareness Association</td>
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<td>St Colm's High School</td>
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<td>The King's Hospital</td>
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<td>The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>Trapezian Mediation and Consulting</td>
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<td>Ulster GAA</td>
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<td>Victim Support NI</td>
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<td>YMCA Carrickfergus</td>
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<td>Youth Justice Agency</td>
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Appendix 2

25TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

Conference Delegate Evaluation Report

“Feel, acknowledge, engage the fear and do it anyway”
Conference delegate.

A summary of the evaluation forms completed by delegates.

At the close of the conference on day 2, every delegate was asked to complete and return an evaluation form. Of 155 delegates in attendance over the 2 days, 36 forms were returned representing a 23% response rate. This report summarises their observations and comments.
Overview

91% said that the conference met their expectations and 89% rated the overall programme as excellent or very good. 79% said the programme was well paced within the allotted time. 82% said the event was the right length with 18% saying it was too short. 6% rated the conference level ‘introductory’, 55% rated it ‘intermediate’ and 39% said it was ‘advanced’.

Speakers

94% said they were pleased with the choice of speakers and they were excellent or very good. 97% said the speakers were knowledgeable and interesting.

Workshops

A: 1st set of workshops – 73% rated excellent of very good.
B: 2nd set of workshops – 81% rated excellent or very good.
C: 3rd set of workshops – 77% rated excellent or very good.

Quotes

“Thank you for a great conference”
“Needed more time for discussion”
“Shorter plenaries to allow greater workshop exploration and collaboration allowing participants to build relationships and increase partnerships”
“The breadth of the conference including the wide spectrum of RJ in so many different areas was very positive. Would like to have seen more of those who have responsibility for delivering the policies engaged”

“Speakers were excellent but because of so many, not enough time to hear more from them. All excellent – atmosphere was so positive…”
“Fewer speakers to allow time for Q&A”
“Whilst the speakers were all amazing and motivating – too many!”
“Some quite interesting speakers were cut short due to others running over”
“Really enjoyed the quality of speakers”

“More time for Q&A in workshops A and fewer speakers”
“More time for workshops – questions and debates were just getting going when we needed to stop”
“There was too much talking and not enough group work, group learning, alternative activities to encourage more experimental learning and diverse participations”
“Workshops felt very rushed. Would have liked more time to discuss issues”
“Workshops should be videoed (echo model)”
Practical arrangements

The following ratings were for ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’:
91% - the practical arrangements and administration
80% - visuals
94% - acoustics
89% - venue and facilities
63% - conference pack* (*The conference pack was provided to each delegate in the form of a booklet. 5 of those who responded to the evaluation questionnaire had not realised this was the conference pack)

Key Learning Points from Delegate Evaluation Forms for Future Event Planning:
- Fewer speakers to allow more time for Q&A
- Longer time allocated to workshops to enable more discussion and networking

Quotes

“Some presenters used font which wasn’t legible”
“Wasn’t so sure about the layout of the main hall – seats packed too tightly together”
“More than one station for tea/coffee after plenaries”

Key learning for delegates (One thing I will start to do or do differently):
“Look for a restorative approach in more transactions”
“Think more about my language”
“Listen more and speak less”
“Be bolder in my resolve to make RP a key part of every aspect of my work”
“Bring back the learning to my team”
“Continue connecting/networking with other participants and speakers” “Collaboration with other agencies and schools”
“Reflect on and follow up with reading/research related to some of the inspiring speakers and topics” “Keep learning”
“Consider the needs of victims more”