



I could leave all my troubles at the door

New beginnings: The Lived Experience of newcomer and traditional communities on the path to inclusion and integration in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

PRISM Project Research Report, February 2021



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

BritishRedCross



corrymeela

IrishRedCross



"I could leave all my troubles at the door"

New Beginnings - The Lived Experience of Newcomer and Traditional Communities
on the Path to Inclusion and Integration in Northern Ireland and Ireland

PRISM Project Research Report
by Ita Connolly

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Executive Summary

The PRISM (Promoting Reconciliation & Integration through Safe Mediation) project brings together the British Red Cross, ArtsEkta, Corrymeela and the Irish Red Cross in partnership. Funded by the EU PEACE IV Programme, we delivered seven user led attitudinal change contact programmes across Northern Ireland in North and West Belfast, South and East Belfast, Newry, Craigavon, Magherafelt, Derry/Londonderry and Antrim. Through the activities of the programmes we aimed to promote positive attitudinal change within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican, Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist & Refugee Asylum Seeker and Vulnerable Migrant communities. The project set out to bring together these three communities through contact programmes and residentials.

The project was a completely new standalone initiative. Each of the partner organisations brought their complementary skills and experience, thus were well placed in delivering the project.

The PRISM programme started in March 2018 and ends in March 2021 with programmes running between January 2019 and August 2020, comprising two-hour sessions over a ten-week period. These programmes were called Relax and Re-connect, except for Craigavon which was a specific capacity building programme. Corrymeela and ArtsEkta worked together on the design of the workshop content, by facilitation using a trauma informed approach, and an arts-based methodology with artists specialising in dance, music, arts, crafts and well-being therapies.

A research programme was designed to assess the programme through the lens of contact theory and a mixed methods approach was developed to get a better understanding of the dynamics that help promote better understanding of others and the barriers that remain in Northern Ireland. There was a cross-border element to the project with participants from the border counties of Ireland. This was facilitated by the Irish Red Cross, an organisation which has been supporting refugees since the 1940s. Irish Red Cross has been working with traumatised single male refugees from Syria since 2015 and was actively involved in establishing Community Sponsorship in Ireland. The aim of this element of the programme was to assess whether barriers identified in Northern Ireland, as a post-conflict segregated society, were prevalent in a non-segregated society such as Ireland. A total of 222 adults participated in our workshops and residentials in Northern Ireland and 61 people took part in the focus group sessions in the border counties of Ireland.

Key findings

- Using qualitative approaches to understand the Lived Experience is fundamental to understanding how contact works amongst multiple groups.
- Using a combination of a trauma informed approach and an arts-based methodology provides a framework towards better understanding of contact between different groups of people and is a combination that should be explored more between and within communities.
- Longer programme lengths are advisable in order to assess the impact of a programme and to address the needs identified. The ten-week programme was too short for building sustainable, long lasting, meaningful connections.
- It is still difficult for newcomer communities to navigate opportunities to connect.
- There are significant levels of loneliness and social isolation – both host and new communities are struggling to make meaningful connections.
- There is a gap in refugee integration support, including barriers to seeking employment, transport, healthcare, and connecting with community support and activities.
- Language remains a barrier to integration – informal methods of learning the language help address the barrier. Community classes and spaces can be a place for learning and inclusion.
- Childcare & a whole family approach is important when designing programmes for inclusion.
- In Ireland, the continuing use of Direct Provision and emergency accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is a barrier to integration and reinforces isolation amongst newcomer communities in Ireland.
- There is a gap in rural provision in Ireland which is a barrier to inclusion and integration. One of the main impediments is access to transport and public transport infrastructure is better in towns.



Pictured at the South and East Belfast project celebration event at Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, PRISM participants and Corrymeela's Programme Manager Denise Bradley, Red Cross NI's PRISM Project Manager Gemma Robinson and Artsekt Executive Director Nisha Tandon OBE.

Recommendations

The British Red Cross, ArtsEkta, Corrymeela and Irish Red Cross believe that straightforward changes to how we welcome and support newcomer families and traditional communities to build lasting friendships and connections can foster inclusion and integrated communities. To achieve this, we recommend:

Northern Ireland Executive Commit and Deliver

Northern Ireland Refugee Strategy: to support people seeking asylum and refugees from day one to integrate and rebuild their lives.

Tackling loneliness and social isolation: newcomer communities, including people seeking asylum and refugees need to be identified as a key group, across all policy and practice on tackling loneliness and social isolation, to support people to build meaningful connections.

Rural inclusion: the lived experience and needs of newcomer communities should be fully integrated into rural community development policy and planning.

Irish Government

Direct Provision: the humanitarian needs of those in need of protection should be supported through appropriate and adequate living arrangements in line with international standards.

Rural inclusion: the lived experience and needs of newcomer communities should be fully integrated into rural community development policy and planning.

At a Strategic Level

Preparation of host communities – more work is required in Northern Ireland to engage with host communities in order to help them welcome newcomer communities. This requires positive leadership and adequately resourced initiatives to address the needs still apparent in our community, post-conflict.

Inclusion or Integration – throughout our programme we heard from participants about their desire to make a positive contribution to society here. However difficulties with the transferability of qualifications and the resulting lack of access to employment opportunities leaves them without the means to carry on in their careers. Ways need to be found to facilitate this process that will enable those from newcomer communities to feel part of their new location and part of their community.

Qualitative methods of assessing impact – in order to get a fuller and deeper understanding of the impact of bringing diverse groups together we recommend that funding bodies be prepared to invest in quality rather than solely relying on quantity.

Programme Design

Cultural awareness – our partnership had experience of engagement and programme delivery with diverse communities. However, we recommend that groups developing similar programmes ensure that the cultural norms of all groups are researched fully and respected in programme design.

Engagement – many long-established local groups across Northern Ireland are tired of external organisations “parachuting” into areas to make use of their access and their members for short-term projects. Consideration should be given to long term sustainability and implementation of findings through support provided to existing organisations.

Programme length – we would advise that those seeking to carry out work of this nature take into account that longer interventions provide a better indicator of impact. Where this is not possible then, as above, consideration should be given to methods of providing ongoing support and development to local groups.

Acknowledgements

The PRISM Project Partnership team would like to thank all those who helped make this programme the success it has been.

We would like to express our thanks to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), who manages the EU's PEACE IV Programme and match-funders the Executive Office, Northern Ireland and the Department for Rural and Community Development, Ireland.

We wish to thank all those who participated in the programmes across the seven target areas in Northern Ireland; the interviewees for their contribution to the programme and the report, and those who participated in the focus groups in the border counties of Ireland. Your contribution has been immense, and it was a pleasure for us as a team to have met you and shared your experiences.

To all the artists and therapists who worked with the programme participants. We thank you for your contribution and please know that your hard work has made such a difference to those you worked with on the programme.

To Mini-explorers, Diversity NI and independent interpreters, and all the ArtsEkta, Corrymeela and Red Cross volunteers. We thank you for your dedication in ensuring the programmes were inclusive for everyone who attended.

We would like to thank all those who rented us community spaces for our programmes.

We would like to express our thanks to all the Good Relations Officers, District Electoral Area Officers and Community Development Officers in the District Council areas we worked in. Your advice and insight at the beginning of our programmes really helped shape our ideas. We would also like to thank those in the community and voluntary sector who took the time to share their insights into the communities they live and work in.



Pictured at Project Launch Event, Red Cross Director Sharon Sinclair, Paul Sheridan, SEUPB Head of Finance and Corporate Services, Corrymeela Head of Programme and Innovation Shona Bell and Artsekta Executive Director Nisha Tandon OBE.

Introduction

The PRISM (Promoting Reconciliation & Integration through Safe Mediation) project brings together the British Red Cross, ArtsEkta, Corrymeela and the Irish Red Cross in partnership. Funded by PEACE IV under Specific Objective SO4.2: Promoting Positive Relations (4.2 Regional Level Projects) *The promotion of positive relations characterised by respect, and where cultural diversity is celebrated and people can live, learn and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.* The project had pan-Ireland aspirations to create, sustain and better understand attitudinal change in a divided society and how to most effectively integrate communities.

PRISM is a three year project which has used the principles of contact theory to encourage integration between the new and traditional communities in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The programme addresses the specific problems caused by the conflict with the aim of creating a peaceful society, developing opportunities for integration and peace.

The PRISM project aimed to promote positive attitudinal change within and between the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican, Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist & Refugee Asylum Seeker and Vulnerable Migrant communities. The project set out to bring together these three communities through contact programmes and residential activities. We worked on changing the way people who took part in our programmes perceive one another and helped people on the programme identify commonalities and develop relationships.

We delivered seven user led attitudinal change contact programmes across Northern Ireland in North and West Belfast, South and East Belfast, Newry, Craigavon, Magherafelt, Derry/Londonderry and Antrim. Each of the programmes consisting of two-hour activities across ten weeks. These programmes were called Relax and Re-connect, with the exception of Craigavon which was a specific capacity building programme. Corrymeela and ArtsEkta collaborated closely on designing and facilitating the workshop content in response to the needs of the various groups. The programme activities were facilitated to initiate and build trust between

the participants. As the weeks developed, there was opportunity to have facilitated conversations about individual identity and culture alongside the opportunity to take part in relaxation therapies. A residential weekend at the Corrymeela Centre in Ballycastle, County Antrim was part of the programme. It gave the programme participants the opportunity to take time away and engage in further activities to promote well-being and the deepening of understanding of others in their programme.

A research programme was designed to assess the programme through the lens of contact theory and a mixed methods approach was developed to get a better understanding of the dynamics that help promote better understanding of others and the barriers that remain. This report details the methods used in the Relax and Re-connect Programme. The report is laid out as follows, firstly an overview of the programme methods used, an overview of each area, with reflections on the specifics of each programme, followed by a commentary on the work carried out with the Irish Red Cross on the comparative aspect of the project, and finally lessons learned and future direction recommendations.

PRISM Project Partners

British Red Cross

British Red Cross is a volunteer led humanitarian organisation which is part of the worldwide Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. The Movement is guided by 7 Fundamental Principles:

Humanity
Impartiality
Neutrality
Independence
Voluntary Service
Unity
Universality

The Red Cross portfolio of services in Northern Ireland includes emergency response, refugee support, international family tracing, mobility aids services, ambulance support, first aid, humanitarian education, and independent living. Over 20,000 people receive an individual service from Red Cross annually, a figure which has doubled in the first year of the Coronavirus pandemic. Others benefit from an active policy and public affairs programme. Services are provided by 800 volunteers and a staff team of around 120.

ArtsEkta

Formed in 2006, ArtsEkta works at the grassroots to strengthen and deepen relationships within and between black and minority ethnic (BAME) and indigenous communities through a series of exciting, inspiring and innovative cultural and heritage based programmes. Based in Belfast, but operating regionally, they are dedicated to enhancing the practice, understanding and appreciation of ethnic culture and heritage within a social and educational context.

Founded by a member of 2nd generation Indian community, Nisha Tandon OBE, the organisation works towards achieving integration and cohesion by promoting equality of opportunity and understanding of different cultures. They enable high quality participatory arts and cultural experiences for all communities, through the delivery of appealing, engaging and exciting programmes helping to elevate the profile of BAME communities and creating an ethos of cultural understanding, respect and appreciation. Their programmes promote arts and creativity as the most flexible and accessible drivers of cultural diversity development, providing opportunities for us all to grow and learn together in creative dialogue.

Corrymeela

In the midst of the Troubles, Corrymeela welcomed tens of thousands of people from different sides of the conflict and enabled them to meet safely, have difficult conversations well and build relationships based on reconciliation and trust.

Today, as our society becomes increasingly fragmented, Corrymeela believes even more in our core purpose: transforming division in Northern Ireland and beyond by discovering new and creative ways of encountering each other. We particularly focus on challenging sectarianism, creating awareness about the legacy of our conflict, empowering marginalised people and developing a theology of justice and inclusion.

Every year at our residential centre in Ballycastle and through our programmes we continue to host many groups and individuals from marginalised and fragmented communities from all over the world. Corrymeela has developed a deep understanding and practice into the awareness of how traumatic events can fracture and shatter society; yet begin to find language, words and dialogue to move towards societal healing.

Corrymeela was founded by Rev. Ray Davey in 1965. These were the days before the Troubles broke out, but the days when troubles were brewing.

Ray was ordained for field work in 1940 with the YMCA War Service. He was taken captive in 1942 and held as a prisoner of war near Dresden, where he witnessed the allied bombing of the city, in which tens of thousands of civilians died. Returning home following the war he helped reconstruct a post-World War II society to promote the protection of minorities and the development of ecumenical social action across Europe.

Irish Red Cross

The Irish Red Cross Society, also a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, established on 1st August 1939, currently delivers a range of services to some of the most vulnerable people in the community through a network of 80 branches. The Society responds to disasters overseas.

Our support to refugees dates back to the 1945–46 period when over 1,000 child refugees from war-torn countries were resettled. Over 1969–1971, at the outbreak of ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, the Irish Red Cross provided support to thousands who sought refuge in army camps south of the border. A programme reuniting families, separated while fleeing their countries to a safer place, has been running for decades. Since 2015 we have been delivering direct assistance to Syrian families, particularly traumatised, single people through the provision of professional casework services promoting engagement with education, employment, social protection and health services. The Irish Red Cross Register of Pledges website collates and manages public offers of goodwill and support, particularly accommodation, which provides opportunities for migrants to move into time limited accommodation and on into longer term and permanent housing across Ireland. We were a lead participant in the establishment of the Irish model of Community Sponsorship and currently provide training, advice, guidance and support to interested community members, in a number of counties, wishing to welcome a Syrian family into their neighbourhood.

Irish Red Cross volunteers provide a number of community training and services through branches, including a comprehensive range of First Aid courses, a transport service for the elderly, and befriending and therapeutic massage care in hospitals, nursing homes and other care facilities. Ireland pioneered the implementation of a Community based Health and First Aid programme in a prison setting where prisoners, as Red Cross volunteers, become peer-to-peer educators in first aid, hygiene and general welfare. The programme won a World Health Organisation Award in 2011 for best practice in prison health and serves as a model for many countries around the world.

Northern Ireland Context

Northern Ireland is technically a post-conflict society, due to the absence of the wide-spread violence that dominated during the years of 1968–1998. A peace agreement known as the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998, which hoped to end decades of deaths and violence.¹ However, despite all the hard work to improve the lives of people during this period, Northern Ireland remains, some twenty years later, a contested space with segregation in housing and schools, along with unresolved grievances such as how to deal with our past. Inter-communal and intra-communal tensions continue in some parts of Northern Ireland. Those areas which were most impacted by the conflict remain impacted with high levels of deprivation and trauma.²

As a consequence of movement to a more peaceful society, Northern Ireland has seen an increase in people from other countries coming to live here. While this is viewed as positive by most people, and great inroads have been made in some areas to provide a welcome, there have been race hate incidents and limited opportunities for meaningful interaction between CNR, PUL and BME. The PRISM programme set out to try and gain a better understanding of this environment and to promote better understanding between and within groups in this increasingly diverse environment.

Literature on the particularities of the experiences of those coming to Northern Ireland is limited but is an area which merits further consideration.³

A note on language – At the outset the labels of Catholic and Protestant were felt by the research team as requiring nuance. Northern Ireland has moved beyond that binary labelling

of the two traditional communities as Catholic and Protestant. We decided to broaden the definition, in line with practice used in community settings as, Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist. Although this also has its implications and confusions, we felt that by broadening out the terms we would get better response rates regarding community background. Similarly, we decided on the term newcomer communities to describe that wider explanation of those who are now living in Northern Ireland but have come from different countries. We deliberately did not want to label people as Refugee, Asylum Seeker, and Economic Migrant etc. as we felt that it was not instructive or helpful to the aims of our project which was to promote inclusion of all. Through the demographic questions in the survey we included things such as community background, country of origin, ethnicity etc. to acknowledge that there are other minorities in our communities, such as, for example, the Irish Traveller Community.

Anxious middle – Initial thinking and design of this study draws on work conducted through the British Red Cross *Open Arms* pilot project.⁴ The term “worried middle” and “anxious middle” is used interchangeably at the beginning of their study to describe the people they wanted to engage with. This is based on the British Future definition of “anxious middle” and this is within the context of immigration. British Future define the “anxious middle” is used as those who are ‘worried about the pressures brought by large-scale immigration but they understand the benefits too.’⁵ If we use this definition by British Future, it suggests that they are amongst all sections within our society. The “anxious middle” is presumed to transcend socio-economic boundaries and in the Northern Ireland context

1 Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations, 10th April 1998.

2 For a concise synopsis see

<https://www.amh.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Briefing-Mental-Health-Crisis-in-Northern-Ireland.pdf>

Since then an Interim Mental Health Champion has been appointed. See, <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/office-mental-health-champion>

3 An excellent early study carried out by South Tyrone Education Programme (STEP) investigated migrant workers’ experience of living in Northern Ireland and found that relationships were difficult to form. South Tyrone Education Programme, ‘Research to Identify Additional Difficulties Faced by Minority Ethnic Groups and Migrant Workers Because of the Conflict in Northern Ireland’ (2010). A research project based at Queen’s University Belfast looked at the experience of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland, Ulrike M Fiona Murphy and Vieten, ‘Asylum Seekers’ and Refugee’s Experiences of Life in Northern Ireland: Report of the First Study on the Situation of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in NI - 2016’ (QUB: 2017) <https://www.qub.ac.uk/home/media/Media,784971.en.pdf>. They note substantial literature on the experience of ‘newcomer’ children in Northern Ireland but not adults.

4 It should be noted that the term does not appear on their public webpage.

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Refugee-support/Open-Arms>

5 Sunder Katwala, Steve Ballinger and Matthew Rhodes, *How to Talk about Immigration* (London: British Future, 2014) p. 12.

<https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/How-To-Talk-About-Immigration-FINAL.pdf>

perhaps go beyond the typical green and orange debate.

Following feedback from initial discussions with partners, colleagues and wider community representatives, the concept of anxious middle, in the Northern Ireland context conjured up notions of class distinctions and the word “anxious” drew discussion around mental health.

We therefore chose to describe the type of cohort we wanted for the programmes as those who were interested in spending some time out to relax, to engage with people from other community and ethnic backgrounds, with a view to building up friendships, particularly if they had limited opportunity to do so previously. Essentially, those who are middle of the road – neither overly anti nor pro- immigration. In the context of Northern Ireland add to that perceptions around ‘the other community’.

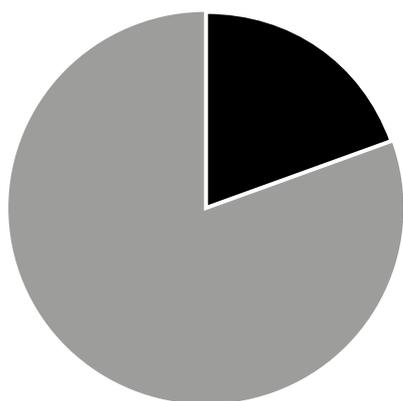
Duration of Programme

The programme took place over a three-year period. It officially began in March 2018 and ends in March 2021.

In Northern Ireland the number of participants reached through the contact programmes and residentials was 222. (180 workshop participants plus an additional 42 at residentials)⁶

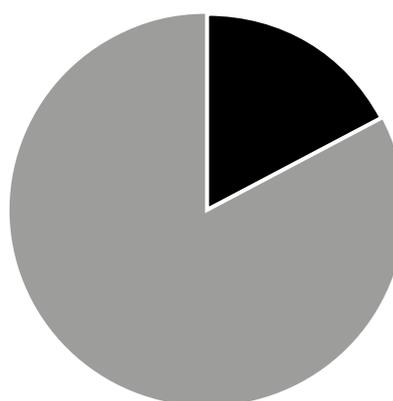
Participants were from Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, China, Egypt, Iran, Moldova, India, Poland, Romania, Sudan and Syria.

Age Range Overall = Whole Programme



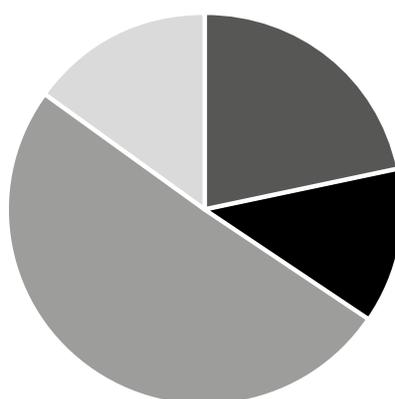
■ Youngest 19 Years ■ Eldest 78 Years

Sex / Gender = Whole Programme



■ 31 Men ■ 149 Women

Community Background



■ CNR 39 ■ PUL 23 ■ Others 91
 ■ Unknown 27* *some people did not like being boxed in to CNR/PUL and did not specify

⁶ This figure comprises participants plus partners/spouses. There were also 33 children who attended the residential but are not counted in the programme figures overall.

Programme Requirements

The specific results we sought in the delivery of this project were:

- to reduce negative perceptions of the Catholic and Protestant cultures and increase the knowledge of ethnic minority communities.
- to develop sustainable pathways for Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Vulnerable Migrants and Catholics and Protestants to integrate within their local communities.
- to evolve new contact approaches to meet the needs of the changed demographics within Northern Ireland and the shifting patterns of identity and culture through increased migration.

Approach to Engagement

The programme was required at the outset to undertake baseline research in the seven areas highlighted in the business case to confirm the target areas. (This is detailed in the methodologies part of the report.)

Recruitment and Selection

The baseline research confirmed the areas selected in the business case with one variation. Following this, the team started to recruit from various community groups and partnership contacts. The requirement was to recruit 30 participants for each programme. This was to be split along the lines of 10 members of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community, 10 members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, and 10 members of the newcomer communities. Taster sessions were held to encourage participation.

Our approach was to focus on a participant-led programme. This approach was important because through the baseline research it was deemed that in different areas there were differing approaches required. A more participatory approach was used so that people felt ownership of the programme, in that the activities suggested would be something they were interested in.

The idea was to work with the participants and see what they would like in terms of activities and discussions. As there was a wide range of activities available through ArtsEkta, participants could have arts and crafts, gardening, flower-arranging, tai-chi, drumming, therapeutic sessions, such as sound healing, reflexology and massage. For some this was a great opportunity to do things that they had never tried before. For some of our groups, that participant-led approach was something new and some were perhaps not used to the approach or lacked confidence to articulate what they would like from a programme.

Covid 19 Impact

All four partners learned to adapt to the environment just like everyone else. The partners discussed opportunities of how to engage during Covid 19 to support programme participants and the importance of supporting well-being of people during this time. This included participants of previous programmes and extending our support to them. The implementation of well-being calls at the start of the pandemic sought to maintain relationships with programme participants and provide support while the partnership worked together to implement the facilitation of online programmes. In addition to the well-being calls, text and WhatsApp communications were developed and supported by Corrymeela staff and volunteers. There was a lot of support required to enable the online engagement setup of Zoom facilities and support for people to be able to download and use Zoom. Interpreting was a vital part of the delivery of the online content to enable inclusion. There were live and pre-recorded artistic sessions from ArtsEkta and packs were delivered to participants to ensure they had the right materials to join in the sessions. Online sessions included: flower pressing, bread baking, Zumba, gardening, storytelling, and history sharing. This engagement allowed PRISM to sustain engagement with the project participants.

Cross-border Work

The majority of the cross-border work took place virtually. This was challenging in that no previous relationships had been built up with the participants in each area and we were relying on their goodwill and interest in order to participate. The contacts in each of the areas were so helpful in explaining the complexities involved in getting groups together. Things which impacted their participation during Covid included those working in frontline services during the pandemic and their availability could not be guaranteed due to work commitments. There were others who were volunteering with vulnerable groups or indeed were vulnerable themselves and that also impacted their availability. We adopted a flexible approach and agreed focus group times and days that fitted with the groups' availability. Generally speaking, it was difficult for the participants but they gave freely of their time and were very engaging and insightful in the discussions. We felt as a team that although we were physically separated the virtual space gave participants the opportunity to speak as individuals and this was enriching to our understanding of the complexities of integration and inclusion, also the pressures brought to bear by living through a pandemic.

Programme Methods

Trauma Informed Approach

Under the theme of *Relax and Re-connect* the programme partners worked on a concept which drew together contact theory approaches through the lens of a trauma informed approach. This was used for six of the seven programmes and for all of the residentials. Corrymeela have been using this approach to their work for many years. The six key principles of Trauma Informed Practice are: 1. Safety; 2. Trustworthiness and Transparency; 3. Peer Support; 4. Collaboration and Mutuality; 5. Empowerment; Voice and Choice; and 6. Cultural; and Historical, and Gender Issues⁷ Underpinning this approach to programming was the theory of Intersectionality, which is used by Corrymeela for their marginalisation programme stream. (Further development of intersectionality in the programme findings is discussed below.)

Medium of Art and Therapeutic Practice to Start a Conversation

As the programme was participant/user led, the formulation of artistic input was directly linked to the principles of Trauma Informed Practice to include a mix of activities to ensure therapeutic benefits and to promote a deepening of understanding throughout the programme. These concepts have been developed and utilised by the partners individually as organisations over the years. However, the combined approach of using arts and creativity through Trauma Informed Practice was a critical tool in developing a programme that is relatively new to the field with regard to building relations within and between the three groupings.

This approach was important for the partners to deepen understanding of how participants responded to different activities and also the rhythm of when they would be included across the ten weeks. This continuity was an important contribution to the success of the programme. The uniqueness of this approach offered the participants opportunities to try something they perhaps had never tried before to see if they liked it.

Language interpreting was important throughout the programme and in all of the programmes ensured levels of participation even if there was a language barrier to communication. Continuity of interpreters was important in order to build up trust and for participants to get the most out of the programme activities. There were interpreters, in a number of our programmes, who were instrumental in encouraging, and empowering participants to engage.

7 'SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach' SAMSHA (2014), pp.10–11. Also guiding their work is: Herman, J.L., *Trauma and Recovery: from domestic abuse to political terror* (London: Pandora, 1992); Bloom, S.L. and B. Farragher, *Restoring Sanctuary: A new operating system for trauma informed systems of care* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Harris, M. and R.D. Falot (eds.) *Using trauma theory to design service systems: New Directions for Mental Health Services*, vol 89 (San Francisco: Dorsey-Bass, 2001).

Methodology

‘the humanity beyond the statistics’

Baseline Research

Area Profiles

Prior to commencement, six months was set aside to carry out baseline research for the programme. As per the business plan, research was carried out to confirm the seven target areas chosen. Area Profiles were developed for all areas. This was the culmination of desktop research on the areas, mapping relevant organisations, developing contacts, and conducting in depth interviews with 31 community representatives. Six of the seven areas remained as per the original plan with Dungannon being replaced by Magherafelt. The areas were warm to the type of programmes the partnership team devised.

Literature Review

An extensive literature review was carried out to develop a better understanding of contact theory within the context of the aims of this programme and its proposed use as a tool to develop better understanding and build positive relations between the three groupings. In wider civic society there is some reticence about contact theory as it is felt that it has been overused.⁸

The intergroup contact hypothesis was developed by Gordon Allport in the United States in 1954. His hypothesis was developed in an attempt to lessen racial tensions in a post-World War Two society where both Black and White Americans served together in war but in the pre-civil rights era remained segregated. It was hypothesised by him that under four conditions contact could positively reduce prejudice of the ‘other’ or outgroup. The four conditions are:

- Equal status – in the contact environment there can be no hierarchy of relationships
- Common goals – everyone in the contact environment is working towards the same aims

- Intergroup cooperation – in aiming for the common goals those in the contact environment must work together in a non-competitive way
- Support by social and institutional authorities – if there is support by authority (political, religious, community, business) the contact has a better chance of success.⁹

Ingroup identification is a factor which requires consideration in the study of how groups interact in settings similar to the workshop/ activities provided by PRISM. We have been told, anecdotally, that some communities moving on from conflict in areas of Northern Ireland do not wish to be pigeonholed into CNR/PUL and see their lives as being involved in more cross-cultural activities rather than cross-community activities. It may be that people do not feel that they need to assert their identity through a specific group, or they are comfortable within their group’s identity and wish to reach out to others. This is a newer consideration for relationships in Northern Ireland and is perhaps a departure from previous perceptions or research on Northern Ireland.

A great deal of the literature on contact theory and Northern Ireland relates to contact between the two ‘traditional’ communities. Throughout the literature reviewed we have found no pointers or previous studies which have looked at contact within the context of three groups.

There is currently more required to look at contact approaches in Northern Ireland with regard to immigration in a post-conflict environment. In a situation such as that of Northern Ireland, the complexities of the post-conflict environment can sometimes prevent action on issues such as immigration and integration of newcomer communities. With the Northern Ireland Executive embarked on delivering ‘New Decade, New Approach’ the opportunity is there to continue to build on work of the Racial Equality Strategy, Good Relations Strategies and go a step further, to deliver on the commitment to develop and implement a new Refugee Integration Strategy.

⁸ This was reflected in a number of interviews during the baseline research.

⁹ GW Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, (Reading MA: Addison-Wessley, 1954), p. 537. For a more detailed explanation of the four key conditions, see: Jim AC Everett and others, ‘Intergroup Contact Theory: Past, Present, and Future’ [2013] *The Inquisitive Mind* 1; Thomas F Pettigrew, ‘Intergroup Contact Theory’ (1998) *49 Annual Review of Psychology* 65.

Programme Data Collection Tools

A mixed methods approach was used for the data collection and ethical guidelines were adhered to.¹⁰

- Quantitative – a questionnaire survey for PRISM programme participants
- Qualitative – participant observation notes (by researcher), Facilitator's observation notes, semi-structured interviews with selected participants to form case studies, focus groups. (Ireland only)

Quantitative Methods

Survey data was collected at three time points during the ten-week programme. At the beginning, mid-point, and end in each of the seven target locations. The surveys were in both in English and Arabic languages. There was feedback sought from participants during the introduction as to whether they required translation to other languages, but this was not required.

Of a total of 180 workshop participants 143 people filled out surveys. All survey data was inputted onto SPSS and analysed.¹¹ Of the seven target areas there were five areas where surveys were completed. In Derry/Londonderry and Magherafelt this was not possible. In the case of Derry/Londonderry group exercises were devised in lieu based on the questions of the quantitative survey. This proved a useful means of measurement of the group's attitudes. Two exercises were completed (one towards the beginning of the programme and one at mid-point). In Magherafelt this was not possible.

The survey provided useful information on the demographics of our participants. However, we found that despite engagement by many in the surveys our results on measurement of attitudinal change did not reflect that engagement. As the numbers reflect above, limited numbers of people completed the surveys at all three time points so an accurate indication of 'distance travelled' during the programmes was limited. Additional analysis was carried out on time points Time 1–2, Time 1–3, Time 2–3. However, people

showed limited change in attitude towards others. This could be viewed as negative, but the qualitative data proved otherwise. Later we provide some analysis of why we believe the quantitative methodological approach was not a good reflection of what was occurring in our programmes and offer some insight into improvements for future work.

Qualitative Methods

The qualitative methods used were: participant observation notes (by Researcher), Facilitator's observation notes (by Lead Facilitator Corrymeela), semi-structured interviews with selected participants, post programme, to form case studies, plus focus groups (Ireland only).

The programme design was for ten weekly two hour sessions with a residential weekend usually mid-point. An issue, we thought may be a factor from the start, was that attitudinal change may not show up in the surveys so the aim was to capture attitudinal and behavioural change through the qualitative instruments, which assessed the group dynamics after each session. It was also felt that in order to get a deeper understanding of people's experience of the programme, with the potential to break down barriers and increase attitudinal change, there needed to be more focus on the 'lived experience' of those attending. The tools were designed to capture this through the lens of the elements of contact theory. The two main tools used to assess this were the participant observation template plus the facilitator's observation template.

The researcher was required to attend the programmes at three points, to carry out surveys with the participants. However, it was felt that this was not enough and when time permitted the researcher attended as many workshops as possible to carry out observation. The participants were aware that the researcher would attend periodically and as trust was built up in the groups this process became a good indicator of progress and comfortableness of participants. In some areas, particularly Magherafelt and Craigavon it was not possible to carry out participant observation due to the nature of the programmes. In Magherafelt, the lead facilitator had identified the multiple layers

¹⁰ All hard copy information was stored in a locked cabinet for the use of the researcher only plus electronic material was securely stored electronically on the researcher's drive to which they only had access.

¹¹ We are grateful for the support on analysis of the dataset from Dr Danielle Blaylock, School of Psychology (QUB) and to Mollie Drew, Psychology Masters Student, School of Psychology (QUB) for assistance on data entry.

and intersections the group had to navigate, such as: rural resettlement, isolation, language barriers, health and well-being challenges, employment and traumatic stress from displacement through war and bearing witness to the loss of immediate family members, which influenced their availability to fully engage with multiple partners. Therefore, contact with the researcher was minimal during the programme. However, a group interview was carried out at the end of the programme with some participants. In Craigavon, the programme followed a business model of capacity building within a community group so participant observation was not possible.

Another valuable tool was the Facilitator's Observation template where after each session the lead facilitator from Corrymeela filled in the form on their reflections on the group's activities and progression. When possible, team debriefs were also carried out with ArtsEkta, Corrymeela and British Red Cross. At the end of each of the programmes a consolidated report was compiled by the researcher and distributed to partners.

Interviews were held with some participants; post programme interviews were held in order to get a deeper understanding. In the cross-border work with the Irish Red Cross focus groups were carried out to aid with the comparative element of the project.



Pictured with North and West Belfast PRISM participants Ita Connolly PRISM Project Research Officer.

Programmes Areas

North and West Belfast Programme

The North and West Programme took place from 14 January to 8 April 2019.

This was the first PRISM programme. Those who attended the workshops were from different parts of North and West Belfast and were made up of mainly Catholic, Nationalist, Republican (CNR), Sudanese and Iranian women. One male did attend for most of the Workshop. He was the only identified member of the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist (PUL) community, with the rest evenly split between CNR and newcomer communities. The total numbers were 30, 29 female and 1 male. Some members of this group voiced their annoyance at having to designate as being from a particular part of the community and felt that they had moved on from dividing people along sectarian lines and asking for this type of information was an impediment to getting to know others from different backgrounds.

There were pre-existing groups who sat together. It is thought that two or three participants did not know someone prior to attending. They congregated in pre-existing groups with participants from the traditional communities on one side and the Sudanese participants on the other. The Iranian participants sat somewhere in the middle. There was a language barrier evident. The Sudanese women had an Arabic speaking interpreter but the Iranian women did not have a Farsi interpreter. This was noted as a potential problem but one of the participants, became an unofficial interpreter for the group.

Group Development

As the weeks progressed the approach taken seemed to appeal to the group. They engaged in activities, particularly focused around arts and crafts and discussions. This type of programme seems to be different and something that might explain the fact that people come back every week.

One participant, who was viewed as a leader or motivator of the group from the traditional communities shared:

“I was really surprised that the women committed to attend all the workshops. They made their own way down and back. It was a learning for me because a lot of people think the city centre is too far away from here but it is accessible. A lot of the women took the Glider. It was a good sign for me about the success of the programme because they came every week. ArtsEkta was central and it was a great venue. People felt very relaxed there and welcomed.”

It was highlighted that non-forced communications received a positive response. Heavily programmed activities were not as necessary in the later stages of the programme for North and West Belfast. One participant made the comment that she had,

‘... been on courses where the point is to meet new people but it is so planned and structured that you are asked to speak but only given a small amount of time to give your opinion and it’s hard to get to know people. This is different because of the activities and you can take time just to have a cup of tea and talk to someone.’

Cultural Exchange

Some were proud to share their culture and practices whereas some were shy and more guarded. Some from the traditional communities expressed feelings of discomfort in talking about Irish or British culture with participants saying that it has been difficult to open up about culture in Northern Ireland due to the conflict. It was, for some, more comfortable to learn about Sudanese or Iranian/Persian culture. The Sudanese and Iranian women were also curious about Irish and British culture as they did not know much about how people lived and local customs and practice.

Murphy and Vieten, in their report on asylum seeker and refugee experiences in Northern Ireland, define integration as a ‘two-way process beginning on the day of arrival’.¹² Integration is

¹² Fiona Murphy and Ulrike M Vieten, ‘Asylum Seekers’ and Refugee’s Experiences of Life in Northern Ireland: Report of the First Study on the Situation of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in NI - 2016’ (2017). <https://www.qub.ac.uk/home/media/Media,784971,en.pdf>,

not solely the responsibility of asylum seekers and refugees but is a process where all members of society must work together to make their society a more tolerant, accepting place.

This sentiment resonated with a number of the group from the 'traditional communities' where they felt it was their responsibility to extend the hand of friendship. A number said that they felt bad that they expected those coming to Northern Ireland to be aware of the conflict and the separations apparent in cities such as Belfast. They had great empathy for people who fled their country, as a consequence of conflict, due to the experience of the Troubles here but some admitted it never occurred to them that people didn't know the complexities of the political and social situation here.

Childcare

Children were small in numbers at the Workshops but as the weeks went on more mothers with children attended. It was sometimes difficult for mothers to switch off although at the start of the programme the babies were a great way of connecting with others as they were passed around the participants at times.

Language Interpreting

As mentioned earlier, there was provision for the Arabic speaking participants through an interpreter. We realised that in order to help build on trust and help with interactions, it was important that a regular interpreter join and sometimes they benefitted personally from the sessions. As mentioned above, an unofficial interpreter presented from within the group.

Attitudinal Change throughout the Programme

Through feedback from people it was clear that the programme, for them, had been really beneficial where they were able to relax, have fun and meet people from other cultures. Most admitted that it was difficult to meet people from other cultures and this programme made them more open and confident to make connections with others. By the end of the programme the participants from the traditional communities were starting to insert their voice into the group. Sudanese women began growing in confidence in the workshops and said that they looked forward to the sessions. It was noted that the Iranian women don't have the opportunity to get together in an environment such as the workshop and enjoyed coming.

Diversity amongst the diversity

After a few weeks the programme became female only and this was viewed as positive, by some of the participants, as it meant that the Sudanese/Iranian women could feel more relaxed.

"I was the only one saying I preferred it and the other Sudanese women said you shouldn't have said it because they think when they come here they have to pretend its okay to be in the company of men even if they feel uncomfortable and they would not do it at home. They all felt more comfortable that it was all female."

As this was the first programme, we were unsure what to expect and what would develop. With most of the group being made up of two separate blocks of people, CNR and Sudanese, we had people who already knew each other and perhaps although initially interested in the programme, found it hard at the start to interact with the other.

"As the Irish women were sitting on one side I thought I should go over and sit beside them. I think they were uncomfortable at the start and the Sudanese women were saying 'why are you doing that X, they don't want us to sit beside them'. X was different and she came over and sat beside the Sudanese women. I realised it was just what the women were going through themselves and when we talked about them as carers ... I realised they were like us. They had conflict in their country just like us and they have responsibilities. We bonded over children."

As the programme progressed there was a sense of coming together and a breaking of cultural barriers. It was generally agreed that the approach taken was something valued by the participants as a break away from their everyday lives but also a unique way of promoting integration and cultural exchanges which may foster lasting friendships.

"During the programme they were able to relax and get involved in conversations with others. As the weeks went on you could see people become more confident. Many of the women were uncomfortable with the exercises that involved getting up and shaking someone's hand... Confidence grew with some of them and after the Residential some of the women came out of their shells and talked more one on one with the other"

women. They enjoyed the dance and a lot of them just enjoyed having a cup of tea and a chat as it was their time to relax away from their responsibilities.”

The Iranian participants also found it hard to connect with the two main blocks of participants at the beginning and issues such as language or indeed confidence in the setting may have contributed. Towards the end it appeared that the Iranian participants interacted more with the members of the traditional community rather than the Sudanese participants.

Residential

Through extensive planning and a holistic systemic approach to understanding the cultural diversity of the group, and to be sensitive to their needs, additional volunteers and resources were drawn on in order to have a successful residential. As this was the first residential in the programme there was a great deal of learning for future programmes.

We learned that for the newcomer communities, they do not have the same level of family support to care for their children, as they are often in this country on their own without extended family members. In order to ensure inclusion of the participants, family members were invited to come along. Those from the traditional community generally came on their own. We therefore, offered in future residentials that family members could be included if participants wanted it.

“The residential was really special. I really enjoyed one night when everyone had gone to bed and some of us stayed up and we danced and laughed. X, X an X, and I really enjoyed myself. I am shy and I don’t like dancing in front of people and I was glad it was all women there.”

Intergroup Contact

- *Equal status* – ArtsEkta as a venue was ideal as it is viewed as a neutral space which is vibrant and multi-cultural. It was perhaps felt that in the initial stages there was group dominance with the CNR participants. As people congregated in pre-established groups at the start there were apparent divisions and the Sudanese and Iranian women may have been viewed as outsiders. There were two people in particular who reached out to ‘the other’.
- *Common goals* – for this group the ‘Relax and Re-connect’ theme helped them take time out and relax and work toward the common goals of meeting new people and learning new things.
- *Intergroup cooperation* – through the Relax and Re-connect activities there was co-operation within the group to achieve the goals of relax and Re-connect along with learning about other cultures and forming relationships. It was particularly noticeable post-workshop.
- *Support by social and institutional authorities* – although the small-grants (MFI) part of the project is not included in the report. This group had support from community organisations to successfully make a bid to hold further contact work and this endorsement helped with the success of the programme.



South and East Belfast Programme

The programme ran from 29 April to 15 July 2019.

Participants on the programme were Sudanese, Iranian, Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican. Some of the Sudanese and Iranian participants were friends or family of participants from the North and West workshop. The total numbers were 32, 30 female and 2 males. In this area it was mostly newcomer communities plus members of the PUL community. The residential was early on in this programme, between week two and three and fell during Ramadan, which took place in 2019 from 5th May until 4th June.

Opportunities for Cultural Exchange

Baseline research indicated that South Belfast is the most ethnically diverse part of Belfast and it seemed from the outset that there was a curiosity amongst the participants to reach out to others and learn more about other cultures. This seemed particularly prevalent post-residential and that there was good potential for breaking down barriers through this project.

Within the Sudanese community a leader emerged amongst the group who was quietly reassuring to the other women and encouraged them to take part in the activities and discussions. She herself was very active in engaging with the activities. Amongst the “local” participants there were two people who were consistent leaders – reaching out to the other participants. They seemed to be active within their own community and wanted to share other activities and events to include the other participants. With the Iranian participants there seemed to be disengagement at times and it is not clear whether this was solely about the language barrier as the volunteer from ArtsEkta has been consistently there to help with interpreting.

As the weeks went on there were opportunities for discussions both facilitated and informal amongst the group. One particular week was arranged to be a cultural exchange event with participants encouraged to take part. The Sudanese participants, at one stage, became distressed when they spoke about home due to the ongoing unrest there. At this time Eid was suspended by the military and there

were violent clashes. The Iranian participants seemed to engage more during this session and shared about culture and music. There were also opportunities for members of the traditional community to share their culture and stories about growing up in the area. It was noted by some of the members of the traditional community that it was almost “easier” to talk about other countries than to share Irish or British culture because they didn’t want to offend. However, they were encouraged that this was a safe space and respect would be shown to each other.

During the following week’s discussion about the cultural exchange event, a member from the traditional communities said that she had shared her story and she felt supported within the group.

‘I knew I was saying things about my story in front of people who would find it difficult. Without respect it is hard to get your voice heard and people interrupt you and you are subject to their agenda. It was different here – people listened.’

The Sudanese participant shared that ‘hearing stories from home was hard.’

One participant, who was interviewed post programme shared that:

When they arrived they didn’t know the politics in Northern Ireland and the division but understand it a bit more now.

‘[We] ‘don’t know Catholic or Protestant’ for us everyone is different’.

Although numbers varied from week to week, towards the end of the programme there was a sense of comfort amongst the participants and warm exchanges and informal conversations featured. It was commented upon by the interpreter, during one session, that in the 25 years she lived in Northern Ireland she had not experienced the diversity and warmth of relationships evident amongst the group at this session.

Sustainability of Friendships

Towards the final week, it was possible to see positive relationships forming between different people. Some spoke about meeting up with each other outside of the programme sessions. There was a feeling expressed by members of the group that this was just the

start of relationships and at the end a number of the participants went to Ormeau Park as it was such a nice day. A Facebook page was set up so that the participants could communicate with each other. This was a good indication that genuine friendships had been forged during the programme and that barriers had been broken down particularly with the local participants and the Sudanese participants. These groups seemed generally open to sharing of culture. The recipes shared at the cultural exchange day in week six were made into a booklet by Corrymeela for the participants to take away.

Although the cohort of participants was similar to the North and West programme, this programme felt different from the beginning.

- From the start there did not appear to be a hierarchy of relationships. This may be attributed to the fact that a lot of the members of the traditional communities came as individuals rather than a group although some knew each other before the Workshops. The Sudanese and Iranian participants came in pre-formed groups but did not appear to be dominant as a group.

Childcare

- Childcare facilities were available for these workshops due to the large numbers of children. This was viewed by all as necessary in order to help the mothers engage in the programme and feel welcomed. A number of the children were quite young and it was difficult at times for them to engage due to the needs of the children. However, the effort made by the partnership was acknowledged and the mothers seemed to be happy that the facility was available.

Language

- Language was identified as the main barrier to sustaining relationships. An interpreter for Arabic speaking participants was available and really helped the participants. However, for the Iranian participants, despite an interpreter being available, it was more difficult for them to engage.

Attitudinal change throughout the programme

- The lack of consistency in numbers each week was a barrier to integration. The surveys completed were small in number which impacted overall. It was felt that some of the participants were ticking a box without fully engaging in the process. However, the qualitative material showed the development of friendships, if not changes in attitude. It was felt that with this group they were open to understanding and reaching out to each other from the start, so therefore had limited room to move.
- During preparation for this programme there was understanding across the partnership that Ramadan would be an important factor to consider, particularly as the residential took place during Ramadan. Along with respect for cultural practices, which was greatly appreciated by the participants who were observing Ramadan, there was incredible learning for the local community participants in terms of cultural traditions, practices and exchanges during the residential. Ramadan also impacted on the numbers attending the weekly sessions, though by the end of the programme participation increased.
- There were a range of complex needs within the group so presenting activities to meet such a wide and diverse group of individuals was limiting at times- keeping materials clear and concise to reach all participants was also a further consideration.

Newry Programme

The Newry Programme took place from 22 July to 7 September 2019.

The total numbers were 32, 28 females and 4 males. The participants' demographic backgrounds were Catholic/Nationalist/Republican, Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist, Syrian/Kurdish, Polish, Romanian and Moldovan. The majority of those who attended were mostly from the traditional communities with some from the newcomer communities. Some of them came in groups of two or three but generally there was no large grouping of people and most of the participants had not met each other before. There may have been some cultural dominance, whether intentional or not, due to the numbers of participants who are from the two traditional communities but there was a willingness to get to know each other on a one-to-one level as well as in the group situations.

The Residential was quite early on in this programme. The group were described as very grateful for the opportunity to get away for a weekend, have fun and learn more about others. For this group, a number had not been in a residential type situation before and the added bonus was that it was free for the participants. It exceeded the expectations of the group and they participated in the events and conversations. There was a light-hearted atmosphere throughout the weekend. Even though the group was not as diverse there was a curiosity and willingness to find out about other cultures. The Lead Facilitator described it as a 'lived experience of diversity' and the group were embracing of that. There appeared to be a confidence amongst the traditional communities participants around cultural identity and there were no difficult conversations. This was viewed as different from other residential where people took the space to go deeper into conversations. From a facilitation point of view there were connections forged as a result of the residential which had a positive impact not only on those who attended the residential, but on the wider group afterwards and that warmth permeated throughout the rest of the programme.

Group development

At the start, with this group, the activities provided by the artists were viewed as a great way to forget about what was going on outside

of the programme, even for those two hours. A number of the participants enjoyed the mixture of arts, crafts and the more physical activities such as drumming and dancing. As the weeks progressed more emphasis was placed, by the participants, on conversations although they continued to participate and enjoy the art and activities to accompany the conversations. The group were encouraging and respectful of each other. With this group there was a general willingness and curiosity about others. As people's confidence grew, they felt more willing to share their experiences and to learn from others about their experience of living in the area.

Normalising of relationships was evident in this programme. This was a theme picked up from the initial baseline research and one which we strived to achieve through the programmes. There was evidence of this through the other two programmes in Belfast and in this programme it seemed to go even further with different participants being invited to attend external events in each other's community. This was particularly on a cross-community level and this could have been due to the age group of some of the participants, who were retired. Although the majority of participants were female the fact that there were four male participants added another dynamic to the programme.

Cultural exchange

This was a very lively group who enjoyed laughing and chatting with others. Cultural exchanges were sought out. The numbers were consistent every week and this type of programme gave the participants the opportunity to have a chat outside of the facilitated activities and really get to know each other. Although this group sought out opportunities to learn from each other each week, there were two particular weeks where participants could showcase their culture. During these weeks Polish, Irish, British, Syrian and Kurdish cultures were shared, and the atmosphere was respectful, with curiosity and fun being the undercurrent of the discussions.

Cross-community discussions did not appear to be an issue amongst this group. Although the majority of the traditional communities were from the CNR community those from the PUL community engaged on issues of identity and culture and there seemed to be an acceptance of each other and a warmth displayed. It was as if community background didn't matter and those

present were comfortable enough in their own identity to reach out to others.

In order to support inclusion, the importance of support throughout the programmes was illustrated through:

Childcare

The younger mothers formed some relationships inside the group when they brought their children to the programme – particularly after the residential. Their involvement was impeded at times due to the needs of the children. Some mothers and other participants commented that the children had grown in confidence throughout the programme. Childcare was provided and when comfortable the children went to the separate room provided. When this was not possible, they played in the room and the younger mothers commented that they appreciated that the volunteers sat with them and engaged them to ensure they felt engaged in the group discussions.

Language

Initially the issue of language was raised by the Polish participants and they expressed feelings of discomfort due to varying levels of understanding of English. To remedy this and maintain their participation the Facilitator arranged for a Polish man to come and provide translation. He supported them by taking part in activities and encouraging their participation. His presence had a really positive effect not only on the Polish participants but also the other participants, particularly, though not exclusively, the male participants. There was also an Arabic speaking interpreter for those who participated from the Syrian/Kurdish community. There was a break in their participation for a number of weeks but when they came back to the group they were welcomed and over the last few weeks there were great exchanges and although language remained an issue, people found other ways of communicating.

Attitudinal change throughout the programme

With this group there was a curiosity to learn more about each other's background and although some may have been apprehensive or nervous at the start there was a growing cohesion in this group and, as this occurred, attitudes and confidence grew to have informal conversations outside of the planned activities.

Participants shared their experience of coming into the group first and not being sure about how the programme would work and how they would feel about others. Changes occurred quite quickly in this group and perceptions and attitudes changed. One participant wished to share her journey from the start of the programme to the end and how her attitude changed as a result of participation in this programme.

***“I think people are afraid to mix. It's different with the Eastern European people who came because they sort of kept to themselves but lived around us. Some of my neighbours are from Poland.*”**

***I think there are negative perceptions around the dress of, say, the Syrian people and this is due to things like the media and how it portrays them; and there is a shortage of houses here, and people see Syrian people moving into the area.*”**

***I had those negative perceptions before attending the programme and I wanted to point that out to say that the programme completely changed my opinion. I wanted to say this because I feel completely different now having got to know the Syrian women and all they have come through to come here. I felt really bad when the grandmother said that she loved us and that we are friendly. I felt bad because I wasn't, because I felt that way at the start, and I wonder if people are nice to them. I hope so. Because my opinion has changed so much since starting the programme, I want to continue with the friendship I've built up.*”**

One participant from the newcomer communities shared about her experience.

***“The programme changed my life. I was sitting at home looking after my son and I had no friends. My husband went out to work and I was on my own. I was starting to get depressed and just having two hours a day to have fun really helped me. The fact I could bring my son with me was great as I didn't have anyone to look after him. I loved it. I really liked Corrymeela as I was able to see another part of Ireland. It was beautiful and everyone was so friendly. We became closer as a group due to this programme.”*”**

Reaching out and sustainability of the project

The group felt that ten weeks was a great taster as to what could be achieved through interaction but they, like so many other groups, were sad when the ten weeks were up. They were keen to sustain contact beyond the programme and applied for and secured an MFI grant. They wanted to replicate the most enjoyable parts of the original programme and the participants carried on meeting up during this time.

“There is a strong bond even through the language barrier. We’re from different cultures but the barriers have been broken.”

Newry group and contact theory

For this group we were confident that the four conditions of contact theory were met.

- **Equal status** – no group seemed to want to dominate the space and a safe, trusting environment was established quite early on in the programme. This could have been due to the fact that few of the participants knew each other before the programme started.

Language remained an issue though steps were put in place to mitigate the language barrier. The group aimed to work beyond the language barrier to ensure there was no hierarchy of relationships and that all were equal.

- **Common goals** – it was clear with this group. They wanted to learn more about others in the group both cross-community and cross-culturally. The fact that the mixture of activities had a positive effect on the well-being of many, as expressed by them, helped them work towards reaching out to others.
- **Intergroup cooperation** – from an early stage the group started to work as a cohesive unit with some taking the lead at times while happy for others to take the lead at other times. The MFI opportunity was viewed as a way that the group could work together to continue their contact and ownership of it was amongst all the group members, not just a few participants.
- **Support by social and institutional authorities** – the inter-faith group, which some participants belong to endorsed their members’ participation as a means to help them come together in a trusting environment to discuss contentious issues at a cross-community level. It was expressed that methods used by this group will be explored by the inter-faith group.



Pictured at project celebration event at Ballybot House Newry, PRISM participants and Corrymeela’s Programme Manager Denise Bradley, Red Cross NI’s PRISM Project Manager Gemma Robinson.

Craigavon Programme

The programme ran from 24 September to 3 December 2019.

This was a different focus for the PRISM project and the approach was based on a need identified in the community, which was to develop and diversify the Brownlow Community Festival in Craigavon. It was felt through talking to community representatives during the baseline research that the Festival could be a way to bring the diverse community in the area together through the established festival. The programme was built around providing advice on building the capacity of the Brownlow Festival to make it more inclusive to the diverse population in the area. An external facilitator provided ten weeks of a programme. This was business focused rather than using the approach utilised in the other six programmes.

The total number of participants was 22, 12 females and 10 males. There was a balanced mix of CNR/PUL but there was no ethnic minority representation. In the surveys a number of people identified as other/neither. The group comprised of members of the current Brownlow Community Festival plus others working and volunteering in the community.

As this was an externally facilitated programme with discreet activities carried out every week it was not appropriate to attend sessions except to carry out the surveys at the three points (start, mid-point and end) no participant observations were carried out by the researcher.

As with other programmes, some members of the group had difficulty with a question around community background and felt that they lived amongst each other in Craigavon and religion and community background were not an issue for them. Some were uncomfortable and indeed offended by the questions. This, although a requirement of the programme to reflect the backgrounds of those we engaged with, was viewed by many as counter-productive and a barrier to progression and integration. One participant said that due to her work in the community sector, in the area, she was used to filling out forms and having to designate, but was “delighted that some didn’t” designate and

the discomfort around it was more reflective of feelings on the issue in the area.

Contact

Although this programme was different to the others and the third grouping of the newcomer communities was not evident here, there were some instances when contact was successful. For example, if we look at the four conditions, they were present in this programme.

Equal status – at the start of the programme there were people who represented the current committee and others who had previously not sat on the committee. When the AGM took place in January 2020 members of the group who were not previously on the committee were selected with current members to lead the changes for 2020.

Common goals – the group worked towards the common goal of making the Brownlow Community Festival more diverse and reflective of the changing dynamics in the Craigavon area.

Cooperation – from the outset the Facilitator aimed to break people off into groups away from those they knew or came with. This was with an aim to break down barriers, have people cooperating towards a common goal, and to promote inclusion amongst the group. This worked well and by the end of the ten weeks it appeared that the group had taken many courageous steps together.

Support from hierarchy – The local council have been supportive of this process and it will be a test when the festival takes place to see if the required changes have brought positive results.¹³

Capacity building and reaching out to newcomer communities

Although discussions were focussed solely on the Festival, and it appears that the real opportunity to talk about diversity took place at the Residential, as the weeks progressed the aspirations to be more diverse and reflective of the population in the area were discussed at a practical level. What is interesting about this programme is that they are consolidating and organising themselves to reach out to reflect Craigavon’s diversity and this is something that the group had previously been unable to do. Due to the new committee membership, part of their

¹³ Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has published its own Integration Strategy for 2018-2022. Available at: <https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/council/corporate-publications/>

business action plan is to reach out to newcomer communities and people who are well placed in the community are taking the lead on this. For this group, diversification also means youth involvement.

Moving forward, for our research, this programme could be illustrative of a model of building community capacity at a grass-roots level to reach out to newcomer communities in the various areas. For this committee, discussions on how best to approach newcomer communities with the aim of engagement and recruitment to the community festival committee was an element of their process of diversification. Some communities across Northern Ireland need to engage in that capacity building work in order to address diversity concerns and the process of inclusion.

Magherafelt Programme

The programme ran from 24 September 2019 to 7 January 2020.

The total numbers were 22 females. The participants' demographic backgrounds were Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (2), Syrian and Kurdish (20). The majority of participants who attended from the Syrian/Kurdish community came to Northern Ireland through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS).¹⁴

Quantitative versus qualitative learnings

A useful learning for PRISM was the experience of this programme in Magherafelt. From the outset this programme was different to the others. As the programme progressed different needs emerged. For this cohort of participants, a quantitative survey exercise was not possible. A proposal with the suggestion of a facilitated exercise incorporating questions from the survey, in a discussion format so everyone could be involved, was not possible to carry out either, due to the vulnerabilities of the group. It was decided that persisting with a survey would have prevented the women from attending and would have been counter-productive to the aims of the project of inclusion and contact. Mistrust of where the information was going was an issue. The women expressed concern about the survey forms given that they had been through very traumatic events in their country with their government and others, and information gathering had been used against them. When initially approached and when the survey was explained a number said that they had to ask the permission of their husband or some seemed very concerned about even filling out an anonymous survey. Suspicion around filling in forms could be viewed as an impediment to getting to the research, but the rigid approach of a quantitative survey is counter-productive in instances such as this.

The researcher met with three participants post programme. The issue of trust was not with the organisations involved in the PRISM programme but more about where the information was going.

This group were not ready to engage with the quantitative survey as they are traumatised and an acknowledgement of that is more important than filling in a form. It speaks to the need for further understanding, by funders, of how qualitative work could be valuable in measuring deepening connections and the importance of this should not be underestimated.

Lived experience

The lessons learned from this programme in Magherafelt are evidence of the need for more support for newcomer communities, beyond the statutory requirements of resettlement. The lived experience, as shared by the participants during the programme, provided greater insight into the needs of newcomer communities. Non-duplication of service provision is important so sharing our experience with others working in this area may be valuable in providing a more focused approach when required. Corrymeela have been responsive to this and are making plans to be able to continue working with this cohort and intend to do this for 2–3 years. The MFI has not gained traction in this area despite extensive outreach.

Interactions between groups

Learning for us in terms of engagement has been that there is a recognised need for this type of informal interaction for newcomer communities coming into the area, and that interaction with the local population has been difficult. There were two members of the traditional community, who made great efforts at offering advice and there were instances of interaction outside of the programme environment, including an invitation for the Syrian women to join a crochet class at a local community centre. One of the Syrian women said that she couldn't do the crochet, but she went there to learn more English and that the group were so welcoming.

During a facilitated conversation at the end of the programme. A great deal was shared about individual experiences. Specifically, some said that they had been nervous before and fearful of speaking with people in the community in which they are living. They felt that the programme changed their perspective. One of the other

¹⁴ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/syrian-vulnerable-persons-relocation-scheme>

The British Red Cross is part of the Consortium, which co-ordinates support for those who come into Northern Ireland through this scheme. The British Red Cross role is at the start of the programme where, as part of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Humanitarian Movement known worldwide for its humanitarian role, the organisation leads the arrival and organises the rest centres. A multi-agency approach is used to provide support during this period. After departure, which is usually five days to a week, other agencies such as Bryson Intercultural take the lead in providing support through designated key workers.

women (one of the two local participants) said that she had the same nervousness before coming to the programme. They felt that barriers had been broken down through this programme.

A number said that they found the two hours so relaxing and a break from their everyday life worries. Several of the women were withdrawn during the first few weeks and acknowledged that and how they felt different now. This was so positive for them and they felt grateful for the opportunity to have this time and to focus on themselves.

“[I] Enjoyed the whole programme – I was initially fearful of the community; I did not think that I was accepted by the local people but now I am more comfortable to speak.”

“I have some self-confidence back – feel like a human being again.”

“I had fear at first but now since attending each session I am more comfortable with the local community.”

This programme was as much about building up the confidence and capacity of this cohort of people as it was to provide opportunities for integration and connection. Some women spoke about this being the first time they engaged in any activities outside their homes since they arrived. One woman has lived here for four years and this was the first time she had joined a group. She felt confident that she will try other things after this programme.

Through discussions, as the programme progressed, further understanding of the experience for newcomer communities was gained. One particular session gave an important insight into their difficulties and the opportunity to vocalise them in a safe environment.

Key issues arising were:

Language

This was identified as the main barrier to living in the area. It is isolating, confusing and overwhelming for some people in the group. This seems to be the top tier and other issues filter down from it such as healthcare, education, employment and the more social aspects of moving into a new area such as talking to people. English classes appear to be formal and although important, perhaps there is scope to engage with organisations or charities who provide informal English language sessions. Examples of this

include a once weekly café where people bring food from their own country and chat informally in English. Participants in this programme and others spoke of limited opportunity to learn everyday English in order to be able to communicate adequately with people outside their home. The difficulties with learning English are re-enforcing isolation and loneliness.

Healthcare and Education

Newcomer groups find navigating the complex systems stressful. Examples given were inability to get timely GP appointments and children attending schools outside the vicinity, due to availability of space, but still considered to be in the Education Authority travel catchment area so no support for travel is available. That means that some children are walking over a half hour to get to school.

Employment

Some of the participants said that they were engaging with the job centre but found this frustrating as they could not get work if they didn't know the language.

Engagement with the traditional community

Although some of the participants said they had good neighbours who ask how they are and play with the children, some spoke of racist comments and the feeling that the local community did not want them in the area. Some said that their neighbours will not talk to them and the only social contact they have is amongst each other. The issue of trying to build up some type of cordial relationship with neighbours was a recurring theme during this programme and others.

One of the women spoke about trying to be friendly to her neighbour. At Christmas she bought flowers and attempted four times to deliver them, but the woman was either not there or didn't answer the door. This was annoying for her as she had made the effort to extend a hand of friendship. She explained in Kurdish culture they invite people into their homes and food is always made with people welcome to share the food.

Cultural

Some spoke of the need for a dedicated Halal shop or at least provision in the Tesco. Some are relying on others to bring Halal food from Belfast for them. Some also mentioned women only gyms and Arabic classes for children.

Travel

The inability to access flights from Dublin was cited as a difficulty because they are not permitted to cross the border and there are no direct flights to, for example, German cities in order to visit family members who are living there. This is reinforcing the importance of familial ties, particularly amongst those who are displaced.

Displacement

During a conversation, there was sharing regarding life at home and rituals such as preparing for married life and buying particular things for their houses.

“When the bombs started dropping and destroyed everything, we had to flee with nothing.”

Another woman shared that she had clothes in her wardrobe at home with the labels still on, but she had to leave her home with nothing. Now their perspectives have changed where they do not collect things because they have experience of it all being gone in a minute. This casual conversation on this topic really got to the heart of what happens when you are terrified and have to leave your own country and home in order to stay alive. The fact that you leave without anything and have to start again from scratch is so difficult.

Residential experienced by the women

The Corrymeela weekend retreat was a special time for the group to get away with their families. One of the women said her mother in law came to the weekend and she had only been from her own house to her son’s house before this as she was worried about going out. The Corrymeela weekend was transformational for her.

One of the women said that they were able to forget about cooking, cleaning and looking after their children during the day as this was all provided for by Corrymeela. It meant they were able to relax and especially at night when they could sit together and have some fun, just the women.

“Corrymeela was like Eid for the children – the children are asking if they can go back”.

“They felt cared for”.

Residential experienced by the men

Learning from previous residential meant, to be inclusive, a separate programme of activities was

provided for the males who accompanied the female participants. There was also a separate programme of activities for children and young people. Of interest is some of the insight into the particular experiences expressed by the men during that time. Until then it had been difficult to get a closer understanding of their experience as they were not part of the programme.

On a family basis the men were appreciative of the support provided for them, their wives, and children. As the discussions progressed, frustrations were shared around the inability to get work in their skill areas despite some being electricians and printers in Syria. Issues surrounding certification of skills, aligned to this makes it difficult to prove you have the skills to get a job in your field. The issue of learning English is problematic due to the way they are learning it. They feel that once a week lessons, while welcome, are not adequate to get beyond the basics and lack the ability to express themselves effectively and engage socially and professionally (in the area of their work skill set) in English. One man was volunteering as a classroom assistant in his child’s primary school, but the other men were not working outside the family home. They were particularly keen to do voluntary work in the field of their own professional backgrounds.

Derry – Londonderry Programme

The programme ran from the 4 February until 10 March 2020 when it was suspended and moved to an online platform. The programme completed on 26 August 2020.

Those who attended the workshops were living in Derry City, with most participants living in the City Side. The total number of participants was 27, 18 female and 9 male. The demographic backgrounds were Syrian/Kurdish, Indian, Polish, Chinese and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL)

Many participants who attended were from the Syrian community who came to Northern Ireland through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS).

The project learned a lot from this programme. There was eagerness amongst the participants to get to know members of the traditional communities and find ways to engage and communicate with them. Despite initial interest and extensive engagement prior and during the programme, participation was mostly from the Syrian community. This, however, provided opportunities for the families to have time away from their worries about home, their families and adapting to a new life here. As with other programmes there were complex issues to consider and, using the inclusive approach which was so important to the programme, required flexibility.

Language

Language is a common theme in all the programmes with newcomer communities. The Syrian participants described the organised English classes for them as being useful but not enough. More informal opportunities to practice English would help to address levels of comfort in using the language on a daily basis. One participant said that he would love to be able to talk to his neighbour but must wait until one of his children is there to translate. This is frustrating for him. In addition to the interpreter already engaged by PRISM for this programme, Corrymeela were able to provide an Arabic speaking volunteer who interpreted for the men when the sessions were separated by gender.

Consideration around where people are housed

With this group they were open about enjoying Derry City and that people were friendly. They were in no way critical of the help they have received.

“Back home if they do not know you they will not speak”

“In Derry some people will say hello in Arabic”

However, a number of the families were from rural communities in Syria and were placed in houses with small backyards. They would love to see some type of vegetation and be able to grow vegetables as they did that at home. *“Traditions are very different – getting together is difficult – the houses are small and always cold”*.

Longer interventions

For this group, as with others, longer interventions could have led to pathways into other groups and organisations of interest for them. Due to the fast pace of the programmes it has been difficult to follow up on issues presented by the group. Relatively simple things such as allotments in the area, men’s sheds and local information, which may be already explored by their case workers, was followed up where possible. The requests or identified needs exceeds the capacity or remit of the programme but signposting or making connections is an important aspect of support past the lifetime of the programme.

Employment opportunities

This theme is something which has occurred in previous programmes. In this programme the men were open about their frustrations at not being able to get work in their profession, in order to be able to provide for their families and to ‘give something back’. Two men shared that they were carpenters and one man in particular said that he was encouraged by the job centre to sign up with an agency who said that they would be in touch regarding work for him. It had been two months and still no word from them. He explained that he had been a supervisor in a factory, responsible for 150 workers. His sadness and frustration were visible. Engagement with some grass-roots organisations in the area may help with engagement and may lead to employment opportunities for some of the men.

Cultural considerations

This is the first time we have ever had a significant number of men in a programme. It was a good opportunity to better understand the cultural practices of this cohort of people and how integration barriers present themselves.

The issue of separate sessions did occur in the Magherafelt programme and the possibility of the group being together has enriched this programme. The Syrian women in this programme were accompanied by a male member of the family and this has made the mixed-gender participation possible.

Inter-cultural exchange had been minimal in the initial weeks. During the scoping stage of this project, it was shared by many in the area that there had been a lot of effort placed on welcoming the Syrian people to Derry and that the community rallied round the people through positive leadership. Much of that community support has waned over time. The Syrian women appear to be linked into various groups in the city. It is less clear about the men in the group. They seem to have good support through the Islamic Centre but as for other activities it is not clear.

Although the majority of participants are Syrian, there have been good exchanges evidenced at sessions between the Indian, Polish, Chinese, Egyptian and Syrian participants. There were two members from the traditional communities present at one session but unfortunately, they were unable to attend subsequent sessions. It is acknowledged that other factors impeding integration are around cultural practices. One contributor felt that this is an issue for migrants, particularly who are Muslim as much of the social life is around pubs and nightclubs. However, there are more opportunities to get to know people if your children are at school.

During a discussion on different cultures and openness to others, one participant said, ***“the world is like a large garden full of different trees, plants, and flowers but it is important that we are together in that garden”.***

Intra-communal relations

Most of the participants from Syria knew each other before the programme. At the start they said because they were from different parts of Syria (mostly Aleppo and Damascus) they found

it difficult to understand each other due to the dialects but they have found common ground and appear to provide good support to each other.

Childcare provision

Childcare, as in other programmes, was an important component of the workshops which means that parents can engage in activities and know that their children are being cared for and entertained. The children present in this programme were welcomed by the other participants warmly.

Engagement during Covid

The men expressed the desire to understand better the environment that they are living in and to learn more about the history of the City. There were plans to get more discussion going but they were temporarily put on hold at the start of the Covid 19 Pandemic, when all face to face sessions had to be postponed. This programme had to move online during the first phase of the Covid 19 Pandemic. Corrymeela and ArtsEkta worked together compiling a virtual programme for the participants. Through the interpreter who was with the group from the start of the programme and continued that support virtually, we learned that the participants looked forward to the sessions every week and would have liked the programme to last more than ten weeks. The men enjoyed the sessions on identity and history.¹⁵

¹⁵ Interview with interpreter 9th September 2020.

Antrim Programme

The programme ran between 22 February and 11 March 2020 when there was a break, due to Covid 19. The programme resumed via WhatsApp communication between 18 June and 7 August 2020.

Due to feedback from community representatives in the area regarding difficulties in engaging participants in programmes, an intensive engagement and outreach exercise took place in the months prior to the programme to encourage participation. However, this did not materialise in numbers and during the programme there were 17 participants, 12 females and 5 males. The demographic backgrounds were Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL). There was no participation from the newcomer communities.

The intimacy of the sessions appears to have provided an opportunity for everyone to participate. Several of the participants had pre-existing relationships, with one participant encouraging people she knew to join from week one. It would seem for this group that they enjoyed the opportunity to avail of therapeutic sessions and engaging in discussions around well-being. The T1 and T2 surveys were completed, with some having no problems but others sharing difficulty or uncomfortableness on both occasions. The voluntary and anonymous nature was explained by the researcher in the first week and during week five, the Facilitators invited the researcher to again explain the purpose of the research and the voluntary and anonymous nature of the surveys.

The opportunity for cultural exchange appeared limited, with an exercise in week five, where people were described as being unsure as to what culture meant to them. As the sessions were terminated after week seven it is difficult to assess whether there would have been opportunities for deeper discussion on cultural issues had the programme continued in a face to face manner, which of course was impossible during Covid 19.

Covid virtual sessions

In order to maintain contact and reach out to the Antrim group, Corrymeela and ArtsEkta worked on a programme of virtual engagement with the group from 18 June and 7 August 2020. Establishing this programme and maintaining

contact took a lot of planning and the partners worked together to design a programme that was suitable for this group of participants. Communication between the group took place via WhatsApp and text. Follow up by the facilitators took place on a bi-weekly basis. The sessions comprised of dialogue and therapeutic and creative art activities.

Facilitators' reflections on the programme:

Although the researcher had no contact with the programme participants during this time. The facilitators drew up some reflections. They found that the participants generally engaged in the WhatsApp group and the activities on offer. With one participant's family members also being able to avail of the therapeutic and artistic sessions. Although the residential element of this programme has not taken place, due to Covid 19, Corrymeela have maintained contact with the group via WhatsApp.

"I found lock down really hard and I didn't see my mum for months because of the restrictions. Corrymeela set up a WhatsApp and it was brilliant. We were all able to connect, ... I really liked the craft packs they sent and Laura did mindfulness. It was so good that I used it a lot to get off to sleep. I find it hard to sleep. Denise checked in with us and had thoughts for the day and things like that. It really helped to think that they cared about us. With living on your own and not being able to go anywhere it was good for me to have that contact. The craft packs they sent were great."



Working with the Irish Red Cross in the Border Areas of Ireland

Comparative Element of Prism

Following the deliverables in the PRISM business plan, to have an effective research study we were required to compare and contrast our findings with a control group in Ireland. To accurately determine the difficulties newcomer communities face in terms of integration into segregated communities within Northern Ireland we must also explore the issues that prevail within similar communities integrating into non-segregated communities, like those in Ireland. The aim with this part of the programme is to assess whether or not barriers to integration are more prevalent in a segregated society such as post-conflict Northern Ireland.

Methods

The partner for this part of the PRISM programme is the Irish Red Cross, which is the National Society operational in Ireland and a member of the worldwide Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, of which the British Red Cross is also a member. The methods used for the work in Ireland differed from the original business plan. This was due, in part, to human resource changes within the Irish Red Cross. The Irish Red Cross's work includes providing support to those

in need of international protection. However, access to a cohort similar to that in the PRISM programme in Northern Ireland was challenging, therefore the approach was taken by the Irish Red Cross to provide introductions to already established groups from English Language classes at local Education and Training Board Institutes (ETBIs) and community groups in the designated border counties of Ireland. These were one off sessions in Cavan, Donegal, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo.

The approach was to carry out a combination of a quantitative survey and a focus group session. The timeframe was December 2019 – August 2020. Due to Covid 19 all face to face activities on the PRISM programme were suspended. Instead videoconferencing was utilised in lieu of the face to face focus groups. Although the questionnaires were prepared for an online platform there were considerations around comfort with online forms and access that we determined could hamper participation in the focus groups. Therefore, Sligo and Donegal were the only areas where quantitative surveys were carried out.

| | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|
| Louth | Angola | Monaghan | Angola | Donegal | Slovakia |
| | Brazil | | Croatia | | Somalia |
| | Ireland | | Ireland | | Pakistan |
| | Egypt | | Latvia | | Afghanistan |
| | Kenya | | Nigeria | | Ghana |
| | Latvia | | Sudan | | Philippines |
| | Nigeria | | Albania | | Ireland |
| | Pakistan | | El Salvador | | Philippines |
| | Sudan | | Georgia | | Latvia |
| | Syria | | Italy | | South Africa |
| | Zimbabwe | | Latvia | | Botswana |
| | Lithuania | Cavan | Bulgaria | | |
| | Nigeria | Ukraine | | | |
| | Poland | Nigeria | | | |
| | Somalia | India | | | |
| | Spain | | | | |

Focus group participants were various nationalities from around the world plus Irish nationals.

Scope

This project was not intended to be a fully comprehensive account of all aspects of life for all newcomers to Ireland but a snapshot of some experiences. It is important to state that the experience of those who took part in the focus group is their experience and does not claim to be representative of the whole population, just as with the experience of those involved in the programme in Northern Ireland. However, there are some useful insights into the experience of those working and living in Ireland who came from different countries. This is of interest to this project where some comparison can be made between a post-conflict society and one which has had an absence of conflict.

The length of time in Ireland ranged from 2 months to 26 years.¹⁶ The focus group sizes ranged from 6–11 people and the total sample was 61 participants from twenty-eight different countries plus Irish participants. Those who took part in the focus groups were diverse in their experience of living in Ireland due to the range of time they have been in the country. There were people who were already linked into groups and in some counties there appeared to be a vibrant multi-cultural network. In other areas there were perhaps not the levels of support identified by the people themselves as being needed.

Opportunities for integration – meeting people from different cultural backgrounds

Perhaps as anticipated, there is a rural/urban divide. It appears, at least on the surface, there are better opportunities for people to meet in the towns but in rural areas it is more limiting. One of the main impediments is access to transport and public transport infrastructure is better in towns. For example, Letterkenny was described as a metropolitan town with a vibrant multi-cultural scene where there are opportunities for people to meet but it is more difficult in rural areas. Similarly, in other rural areas there were impediments to integration opportunities due to public transport constraints. One person in Monaghan said that in her experience **'If you don't go to mass or football [GAA] it is hard to integrate'**. Another person in Cavan involved his family in the local GAA and said this was to get to know people in his rural community. He said that at first there were some stares, but that people were

welcoming once they got to know him. This could be attributed to his tenacious attitude and rather than waiting for an invitation, he decided to join. Another participant in Louth contributed that as a newcomer to the area she was never approached to join any initiatives or activities but that she sought these opportunities out. She said there are a lot of activities and opportunities to meet other cultures but **'no one will look for you'** you must make the effort yourself to join.

A contributor, who is part of a cultural community group shared, **'we create opportunities to integrate. It has to be created as it is difficult for some to do it naturally'**.

Others opined that, 'Integration is cold, very mild'. 'There is no inclusivity' 'there is resistance to integration'. One person felt very strongly on the issue and feels that for him Ireland is a hostile environment where the authorities do not want to promote diversity or inclusivity.

From conversations across the focus groups it appears that there are a number of opportunities for people to engage in cultural exchange but for some it is hard to find out information, particularly if your journey to Ireland has been recent, and you have no previous connections to an area. One contributor said moving to a new country is a major thing and depending on your circumstances can be very traumatic. He felt that it needed to be a natural process/progression. **'It takes a reasonable amount of time to adjust.'** The transition can be difficult, and it is important to let natural interaction be supported.

For some nationalities coming to Ireland, or indeed other places, they wish to stick together and not engage in cultural exchange with the local population. Different contributors across the focus groups said that some people feared a dilution of cultural values from their home country and that their children would become **"westernised"** if they mixed with Irish people.

Attitude towards newcomer communities – are people welcoming of newcomer communities

One participant contributed that there was **'miseducation about what diversity means'** in the area he lives in and that people are friendlier to those who have a closer skin colour [to white] so Eastern European people tend to

¹⁶ With regard to the newcomer communities we engaged with in Northern Ireland, length of time in Northern Ireland varied from 3 months to 5+ years.

be treated more favourably than someone with **'darker skin'** with the exception of Roma people who he feels are not favourably regarded.

One participant said in her experience people are **"polite but not interested"** but in the school her children attend there are opportunities and **"schools are interested"**. It's a multi-cultural school and she is very positive that the children all learn about each other's culture and invite parents in as well to share. One participant who has been in Ireland for twenty years felt that Ireland has changed a lot since she first arrived. She said that there is more acceptance of foreigners. When she came first people were **'looking at me as an alien'**. She said there was less understanding about her head covering. She feels that people are friendly and polite, but don't want to offend so perhaps don't reach out.

Throughout the focus group conversations there was a diverse range of opinions on opportunities for them to get to know people and learn more about Irish culture and the diverse populations living in their areas. Some participants found it was relatively easy to meet new people and get involved in activities and there were many positive experiences shared about moving to Ireland. There are a number of initiatives, both through Government support and through local innovation which bring people together for meaningful contact, support and friendship. In some of the border counties the environment is, at least in more urban settings, that newcomer communities are able to integrate into the local community. Although in some instances these initiatives are led by the newcomer communities with limited buy in from the local populations. It would appear that a great deal of effort has been placed on programmes as Ireland has had newcomer communities settling for decades, particularly during the Celtic Tiger years.

However, some compared Ireland to other countries they lived in where diversity, inclusion and integration were important to the governments, with the Netherlands being an example. Most people felt that there needed to be a change of attitude and more action by government to tackle inequalities in opportunities

for newcomer communities. **'Ireland lacks the ability to capitalise on the multi-culturalism in the country'**. There was also a consensus that along with being **'top down'** at government level there needs to be a **'bottom up'** approach to better inclusion. Some people felt that although there had been positive changes a lot more needed to be done to make people feel welcome. There needs to be opportunities for newcomer communities to **'give back'** as well as a responsibility **'to do something for those coming after us – like comfort but not 'comfort zone'**.

Beyond that period of settling in – integration and inclusion

Issues emerging from conversations appear to have moved on from that initial settling in period that a number of our participants in Northern Ireland faced. Themes which emerged across the board included:

Direct Provision¹⁷

In the focus groups some participants identified as having either been through the system of Direct Provision, still being in Direct Provision Centres or those providing support for those in Direct Provision. Overwhelmingly this was viewed as a negative, dehumanising, and stigmatising policy. Comments included:

'People need "access to normality" instead of being placed in these types of accommodation.'

'There needs to be a new system where people are treated with dignity "rather than a prisoner or an animal.'

A positive initiative from Sligo, the International Café, has provided the space for newcomer communities, including those in Direct Provision along with local people to come together every Friday and share food and have informal conversations. The Direct Provision policy has had such a dehumanising effect on those in need of international protection that this example is positive and welcoming. It also serves as a means for those learning English to have informal conversations to use and learn more about the language.

¹⁷ Direct Provision is the policy used by the Irish Government for those who come to Ireland seeking asylum. For information see, http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/Reception_Dispersal_Accommodation and <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/20943/direct-provision-in-ireland-explained>
See also, *Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process* (Department of Justice: Ireland, September, 2020), which recommends the ending of Direct Provision. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/634ad-report-of-the-advisory-group-on-the-provision-of-support-including-accommodation-to-persons-in-the-international-protection-process/>

English language barriers

One participant said **“you think people are not friendly”** but communication is difficult if you don't know the language. A number of people who engage in courses with the Education and Training Board were complimentary of efforts made to help them learn the language. Some felt that informal methods of meeting up through initiatives such as that mentioned with the International Café would be beneficial to establish and maintain relationships and to practice the language as they often speak in their own language once back at their accommodation. There were some instances where those who were new to an area were enrolled in English classes quickly but this seemed to vary from county to county and it was suggested that people should be provided with the information when they get their Personal Public Service (PPS) number as people have been in the country for a number of years without being aware of the classes.¹⁸

The particular style of teaching was cited as being very European. One focus group said that they are working on a programme called Train the Trainer which enables people from different nationalities to be active in upskilling their communication so that they can teach the English language through a method which is more easily understood.

Public Transport

This was linked to those in Direct Provision or living in rural locations. This was viewed as a barrier to employment and integration. Without adequate access to transport it is isolating and an obvious impediment to creating opportunities for a sense of normality in your life.

Employment

There was a great deal of conversation around employment. Similar issues include the lack of recognition of qualifications with some highly skilled and educated people not having access to employment in their field due to the cost of re-training. Although they were professionals in their home country, they have not been able to get recognition of their qualifications. In some of the focus groups there were allegations of employment discrimination based on race. One participant said that he had three degrees but

finds it hard to get employment in his field of experience. He was asked if he had experience to be a pizza delivery driver and also was required to have experience to wash dishes in a restaurant kitchen in Dublin. Another participant said that he came to Ireland because his experience of Irish people abroad was positive and thought he could make a life for himself and his family. He has found the whole experience of living in Ireland frustrating and disappointing. He is well educated but cannot find work and at one stage was homeless.

One particular organisation we met with is working with people to up-skill them in order to be able to move from manual labour jobs, in places such as factories, to management positions. With comparison to Northern Ireland the issues for people who talked about employment were access issues. It could be that the people we were talking to through the focus groups have been settled in Ireland longer than a similar cohort in Northern Ireland and these are issues which emerged after the initial settling in period.

Racism

Some participants recounted stories of their own personal experience of racism, while in some of the focus groups it was spoken about and not expanded upon, almost as if it was an inevitable part of living in some places in Ireland. One man spoke about being treated differently in a filing station and was refused the opportunity to get cashback from his card when he was paying for items. He said that he got upset as another person at a different till was able to get the cashback and they were white. He felt discriminated against because of his race. He expressed feelings of anxiety and powerlessness.

Another expressed his fears and stated that he was always alert, as he has experienced regular instances of racism. He feels they are everyday occurrences such as drivers stopping at pedestrian crossings for white people but not for him or other black people.

Another participant, who has gained citizenship, said she could relate to the experiences expressed by others but she said that it is other people's problem if they can't see past her colour and said to use a different shop (*vote with your*

¹⁸ A Personal Public Service (PPS) Number is a unique reference number that helps you access social welfare benefits, public services and information in Ireland. <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/12e6de-get-a-personal-public-service-pps-number/>

feet). She said that newcomer communities need to **'stop asking for approval'** and **'we need to change the narrative'**. This person described having gone to an international school in her home country with other nationalities in her classroom and that **'the joke was always on the Irish'**. She expressed the view that the media have a part to play in promotion of positive inclusion and that they **'only focus on the negative'**.

Some Conclusions

- Ireland appears to have more experience of newcomer communities and this has been over a number of years whereas in Northern Ireland this has been a more recent phenomenon.
- On the surface there are a lot of initiatives and an emphasis placed on cultural diversity through councils, schools, and community organisations.
- Through conversations it would appear that in some border areas the cultural diversity initiatives are being driven by newcomer communities with limited buy-in from the 'indigenous community'.
- In some areas there is a polite acceptance, but some people keep their distance and interactions are superficial.
- There is a difference in treatment of those who are in Ireland for work purposes and those who are placed in Direct Provision.
- Stigmatisation is attached to the Direct Provision policy aligned to the fact that local communities have limited knowledge of when people are going to be placed in their community. The process itself is a barrier to any type of meaningful settlement and opportunity for meeting the local community.

Findings and Recommendations

Lessons learned and future directions

The programme was formulated around the concept of contact theory. As mentioned previously contact theory has been used extensively in Northern Ireland to understand how to improve community relationships between the two traditional groups. As we have also recognised through the course of our programmes, identity is a multifaceted concept in Northern Ireland and, within those traditional communities, people are sometimes uncomfortable and resistant to aligning themselves to a particular community. They feel that by doing so, it can become a barrier to building positive relations in the environment of inclusion and non-judgement that we seek to foster.

Contact theory literature has not been instructive in how to study more than two groups. In our programme the ‘third’ group was the newcomer communities and, as we have said previously, this was not a homogenous third in the equation. Perhaps broader theories and concepts can help in understanding how best to help with further programmes aimed at inclusion and integration. The Trauma Informed Approach was a pioneering approach beyond the traditional models of working to understand and promote positive contact and attitudinal change amongst groups. This framework was underpinned through the understanding of the concepts of intersectionality.

The theory of intersectionality was developed by Kimberle Crenshaw and explains the intersection and overlap of identities which have an impact on inequalities. Identities such as race, gender and class.¹⁹ This theory has been developed by others and with particular relevance to our work, Eilish Rooney has used intersectionality in framing the transition in the Northern Ireland²⁰ and most

recently the Equality Coalition has discussed intersectionality with regard to sectarianism.²¹

‘The most one could expect is that we will dare to speak against internal exclusions and marginalizations, that we might call attention to how the identity of “the group” has been centered on the intersectional identities of a few.’²²

The inclusive nature of our programme, in line with the ethos of our collective organisations meant that everyone was welcome. As everyone was welcome we had multiple nationalities in some programmes and varying levels of needs and identities which intersected. As evident from the areas chosen and the demographic who were attracted to and attended the programme, although the framework was determined at the outset, every area was different. Due to the participant-led model, the approach taken by the partnership team evolved as the programmes progressed. The partnership were responsive almost on a daily basis to the needs of participants and adapted accordingly to ensure inclusion.

We learned valuable lessons along the way, which we feel has provided good institutional learning across the partnership but also at a broader level which may be instructive to others carrying out this type of work in the future.

Designing programmes for inclusion

At the outset, we were aware that there was no available “off the shelf” guidance or blueprint on how to carry out working with the three communities and every area presented challenges and also great opportunities for learning, but the team were adapting to change all the time. SUEPB were flexible when we

19 K. Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Add to this identities such as religion, nationality, disability and sexual orientation.

20 E. Rooney, Women’s Equality in Northern Ireland’s Transition: Intersectionality in Theory and Place, 14 *Feminist Legal Stud.* 353 (2006); E. Rooney, Transitional Intersections: Gender, Sect and Class in Northern Ireland (Emily Grabham et al. eds., 2008), and Rooney, Eilish. 2007. “Intersectionality in Transition: Lessons from Northern Ireland.” *Web Journal of Current Legal Issues*, no.5.

21 R. McVeigh, ‘Sectarianism: The Key Facts, a framework report on tackling institutional sectarianism in Northern Ireland.’ (Belfast: Equality Coalition, 2019)

22 K. Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul. 1991), pp. 1241–1299, at 1299.

brought specific issues to their attention regarding the running of programmes. We would advise that closer attention is paid to the levels of need identified through our programme and a cohesive response is made to address the needs.

At a more practical level there are issues we would like to highlight for future programmes of this nature to consider.

Gender lens – understanding the needs of women who are disproportionately affected by displacement, with caring responsibilities, who are more likely to be at home. Those who are separated from family members who may be able to support.

Childcare – there was no initial funding provision for childcare and the inclusion of childcare in the programmes was a big plus and broke down barriers to inclusion. The presence of children also helped with conversations with other groups.

Cultural awareness – this is a two way street. In designing the programmes it is important to understand that there may need to be separate programmes for males and females in some areas. In Magherafelt there was an appetite for it but not enough resources – in Derry/Londonderry this was more nuanced after the learning. Males and females came together for the discussions generally but for activities they broke into groups along gender lines. This was a hybrid of what we do here in our society while respecting the cultural differences in some newcomer communities. Some of the participants expected that people coming here from other countries would know about our past conflict and the particular nuances of living in a segregated society.

Age sensitivity – inter-generational interaction was evident in our programmes and was a good dynamic to add, particularly evident in North and West Belfast and Newry. The inter-generational aspect of this contact had positive implications for extended contact, where people reported that they made efforts to speak to children of participants outside of the programme to reinforce the positive messages of the programme and to reach out and to be seen by others as reaching out.

Disability awareness – being responsive to the needs of those with visible and invisible disabilities. In a number of the programmes we had moderate to high levels of trauma displayed

by both traditional community members and newcomer communities. We also had those who had visual impairment plus language issues. In the spirit of inclusion, great effort was made to ensure that those with visual impairments could contribute to the programme and be supported.

Constraints for programme delivery

10/10/10 Ratios – in a number of areas the quota of ten from each of the required groupings was not met. This was for various reasons. Higher numbers of newcomer communities were attracted to the programmes due to the partnership. For newcomer communities the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is a well-known entity and some of them have had direct experience of being supported at some stage, either in their country of origin or when they come to Northern Ireland. Similarly, Corrymeela was known to the newcomer communities through their outreach initiatives. ArtsEkta has been working in this area for a number of years and is well known at a grassroots level in communities and the type of approach they use through the arts is attractive to people. We found that a lot of people were drawn to the programme because it was something different and they had control over what they wanted to do during the ten weeks.

Reflecting on the requirement to have the ratio, we felt that people from the traditional communities were uncomfortable with identifying as one side of the community or the other and this caused stress and anxiety in some. It also had the potential for people to leave the programme. Moving forward we would suggest that a more nuanced approach be used. Identity is sensitive, as we know, and our work suggests that communities, particularly local communities, are fatigued by it and want to move beyond the numbers game and to be inclusive to others both cross-community and cross-culturally.

Engagement – Collaboration with community organisations and groups beforehand is beneficial. When we were carrying out our engagement and recruitment we encountered groups who were in receipt of funding themselves or who were suspicious of organisations coming in to areas with limited interaction prior to the programme. It is important to work with communities and identify how needs can be matched appropriately with programmes.

There were very few people in our programme who were seasoned community relations people. This is exactly what we wanted but this approach requires longer engagement and outreach, as these people are hard to find. They are sometimes engaged in programmes such as walking groups, support groups, senior citizen organisation or they are told about the programme from someone who belongs to a community organisation. It was important to engage key people to give insight into communities.

Programme length – ten weeks is too short – it is almost like a taster to see if an idea will work or to delve further into understanding needs. The time limited nature of ten weeks results in a lack of strategic bedding down of the issues learned during processes such as these programmes. We felt that only having a ten week programme and moving on is not a good way to conduct work of this nature. The ten week approach is more acceptable if there is something after the ten weeks are up. Our fear, as a partnership, particularly in areas where we encountered isolated and lonely people was that after the ten weeks we would leave them and they would retreat back into their homes and not have the confidence to join other groups, even if those groups were welcoming of them. In order to assess impact of a programme and to address the needs we have identified throughout the programme, longer interventions make sense.

Resources – running a programme of this nature, given the variables noted requires adequate resources. The design of the programme was for one facilitator for 30 people. Using the lens of community relations work, this is most likely feasible. However, the programme required more human resources than was previously allocated. As our ethos was everyone is welcome, we required a more flexible approach where the partnership worked together to identify and implement an increase in human resources. In some programmes there was the Lead Facilitator, two volunteers and at least one interpreter. The residential element of the programme was a massive incentive for the participants, particularly those who came as a family unit. This was resource intensive for the Corrymeela Centre, who were able to utilise their network of volunteers.

Methodologies used for data collection

Quantitative methods

The requirement in the business case was to use a mixed methods approach to data collection. This was an attitudinal quantitative survey to be filled in by participants in each of the areas at the start, mid-point and end of the programme. The qualitative element requirement was case studies in each area. Although the survey used the appropriate methodologies the attitudinal survey did not work and we could not glean accurate quantitative information on attitudinal change within this programme. We felt that the quantitative survey was too blunt an instrument this time round for this programme. Reasons for this were, inter alia,

Levels of suspicion – there were high levels of suspicion in some groups due to the nature of their experience of bureaucracy and form filling, particularly amongst people who have had to flee their country due to conflict and ongoing war. Despite the surveys being anonymous and confidential and although trusting the partner organisations, there was fear that somehow the information could be used against them, as had been the case in their own country.

Language was also an issue. When asking participants if other languages could be included to help their understanding of the process, most said they wanted to test their language skills or didn't engage with the survey. This also revealed issues, some of the questions were misunderstood due to the language barriers some faced. Also reading levels varied so the questions asked also drew confusion. In some instances, there was anxiety about questions and people did not feel comfortable about expressing their opinion in this way.

Add to that the cohort we had attracted to the programme – the so-called “anxious middle”, who through a desire not to offend, had little room for movement in attitude, so the 80% attitudinal change was unrealistic from the outset.

There was pressure during the programme to fit everything in and at times it felt like information overload for participants, particularly at the start when there was so much administrative material required to run the programme. In certain areas it felt that the survey was hampering progress in the groups rather than being a useful instrument to gauge progress.

We felt that through adapting to the needs of the various groups and listening to their anxieties and difficulties with the survey we gained better insight into how to do this type of work. The tool we used was over-ambitious in this type of environment and not suited to the needs of the group. We were sensitive to this and in some areas, surveys were not attempted due to the levels of suspicion, language capabilities and general well-being of the group.

We felt that further work is required to prepare groups for this type of intervention. Our short time frame placed pressure on the partnership, but we suggest that for further work of this nature prior preparation is required. This is aligned to the suggestion that a ten-week programme is too short in order to assess impact of this nature. Co-production of surveys is important as it helps with the development of trust and we can be better understand communities and the appropriate means of data collection.

Qualitative data

Although the mixed methods approach was required, at the outset we had misgivings about the heavy reliance on quantitative data to better understand the dynamics in groups. Therefore, a set of qualitative measures were designed to coincide and supplement the quantitative data to get a fuller picture of the journey of the programme. It is from here that we gleaned our richness of material in order to make a positive contribution to the debate on integration and inclusion. The methods used, charted the progress of the programmes and told the story of the 'lived experience'. We found this was a more accurate reflection of the programme, its participants and the tensions, pressure points and barriers to effective engagement with three communities. Contact developed in all the programmes, albeit at different stages, whether it be preparatory or more progressed. This method of working provided better insight into challenges still apparent in communities.

Cross-border comparators

In our business case we were required to find, through our partner, the Irish Red Cross, groups to compare our themes and findings from a segregated society to a non-segregated society. This work was to be completed in year three of the project. As there were changes to the environment in the Irish Red Cross and its work, it was difficult to find comparator groups. We were fortunate that the Red Cross name was well known within newcomer communities in Ireland and we were able to meet with groups, albeit mostly through Zoom due to Covid restrictions. As highlighted earlier in the programme, the groups we met were forthcoming in their experiences of living in Ireland. In many cases the areas they live in have integration strategies at local level.²³ What we learned was that there are still barriers to integration and inclusion. Our remit was a focus group session. However, in order to assess better the issues, there should be longer interventions with the groups as we were able to get information and almost a snapshot of a particular moment in time in their lives. In order to provide a fuller comparator, more time is needed with groups.

Broader learnings at a policy/strategic level

Based on our observations through these methods that we wish to highlight issues that require more attention at a policy/strategic level.

Employment – throughout our programme we heard from participants about their qualifications not being recognised. This is a costly and time-consuming process where people with the necessary skills to make a positive contribution to society here are left without the means to carry on in their careers. This was amongst those in the professional sphere and also within the vocational skills sector. People who have skills such as carpentry have been advised to sign up to an agency for work but it is not that simple due to language barriers, informal experience not being able to be verified and a lack of means to be able to communicate effectively.

23 Louth and Meath: <https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/services/communities/counties-louth-and-meath-new-joint-migrant-integration-strategy-2019-22/>; Monaghan: <https://www.northernsound.ie/monaghan-county-council-approves-new-migrant-integration-strategy/>; Cavan is currently at tender stage in the process; <https://www.contractfinderpro.com/doc/A0xjY/breffni-integrated-clg-ta-cavan-county/ccl-d-migrant-strategy-tender-research-project-develop> in areas such as Sligo, there is a commitment by council to provide funding under the National Integration Fund 2020 to promote integration of migrants into Irish society. <https://www.sligoppn.com/minister-mcentee-launches-national-integration-fund-2020-to-promote-integration-of-migrants-into-irish-society/>

Consideration of where people are placed where possible – in some areas it has been a positive, local government move to welcome people. After this initial stage of welcome the bedding down support for newcomers is necessary to promote inclusion. We are aware that coming as a group, such as those in the SVPRS has had initial benefits of welcome from communities but other people have not been able to avail of extra support if they arrive as families or on their own. Tapping into local government led support for the long-term is important for integration.

Preparation of communities for newcomer communities – More work is required in traditional communities in terms of breaking down perceptions and barriers. Strong leadership is required to dispel myths around an anti-immigration narrative.

Our experience is that there is an urban/rural divide and in some areas the infrastructure is not there to promote meaningful interaction. We would advise more support, at a rural grass-roots level, to help communities in their work to welcome newcomer communities into their area.

Language is the main barrier - English classes are not enough – informal ways to learn and practice language are recommended – another issue faced by the Syrian people, as expressed through the programme, is the requirement to pass a citizenship test and they are worried about the language and also the understanding of what the process will be.

Capacity building of newcomer communities – Helping groups organise, through using local expertise, to help newcomer communities navigate the local systems and areas is important. There is a dearth of groups run by newcomer communities. It is important to develop ways of working to build up capacity of newcomer communities along with the expertise of local people.

Inclusion or integration – one of the issues is around vulnerable populations. We know from the experience of participants there is a type of settling into the environment which is required before people feel comfortable in reaching out to others and a certain amount of suspicion attached to joining in and being recorded for numbers. Some groups are working hard on inclusion of newcomer communities into their every day activities and programmes and this is to be commended and supported.

Conclusion

The PRISM programme was ambitious in its proposal to bring three communities together in a contact setting over ten weeks to achieve positive attitudinal change. It is the first time that contact theory has been tested with three groups in Northern Ireland. Overall, the approach worked by testing the viability of such a programme to bring communities together if we are to view it as a pilot programme. It brought up a number of issues for the traditional and newcomer communities. It provided an environment for people to talk and illustrated a willingness on all sides to engage, in a safe space.

The programme has drawn attention to the needs of the newcomer communities in Northern Ireland, as expressed by them in their own words but perhaps less so on the host community to support and deliver these. We have not been able, through this programme to assess sufficiently the impact of the conflict both on the ability of the host community to receive and on the newcomer communities to understand. However, during sessions there was a great deal of empathy displayed between traumatised communities. We consider that more work is required in this area to develop understanding and a response. We believe that until we address the issues still prevalent in the host communities, this type of work will remain challenging. We also suggest that the techniques used over the last 30 years plus require some reworking to help address the needs of increasingly diverse communities.

If we look to the themes drawn out of the work carried out in Ireland during this programme there may be wider lessons to be learned regarding the experience of new and host communities. Ireland has approximately 20 years more experience than Northern Ireland in receiving and including new communities. There has been positive and negative learning from this experience. We need to learn from the positive outcomes rather than make the same mistakes.

We know that there is an appetite for further cross-border engagement through the groups we engaged with in Ireland and indeed some work is already being carried out. We believe it is important to provide support to groups providing cross-border linkages and to put in place adequate resources to encourage these mechanisms.

