

Dear SEFF Members,

One year ago, I started a new professional journey with SEFF as an Advocacy support worker. During this year I have been given the opportunity to meet some of the most resilient and brave people I have ever met in my life. I will always be grateful to those who during this year have opened up and showed me their vulnerable sides, that takes real courage! Your stories and pain have helped me understand the real consequences of terrorism, the domino effect triggered after the terror tragedy and its long-lasting consequences. I have also discovered the beautiful land of Northern Ireland and its people, plus I have travelled across England and Wales to meet as many victims and survivors as possible.

If something I have learnt during this year of my life that's been dedicated to the victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland Troubles is that, it may seem more or less difficult and it may take more or less time, but you all have the potential to overcome the effect of trauma and live the life you deserve, and services like SEFF are here to support you achieving that quality of life. Shout out to all those Great Britain based members who have not had any support in 20, 30 years and are still standing and fighting for the legacy of their loved ones and the legacy of the Troubles. You have all my respect and admiration forever.

I sadly have to say goodbye to all the new people I met during this last year, but I am also excited because this new chapter that opens up in my life seems as exciting as the previous one. From September I will be working for St Mungo's, a London based charity that works with homeless people, as a Health Coordinator. I know for sure that your words of REAL wisdom and guidance will resonate with me and my work in this new chapter of my life.

The 6th of September will be my last day working for SEFF and I sincerely wish you all the best of luck and strength in your pursuit of Truth, Justice and Acknowledgement.

Sincerely yours,

Aitor Martinez.

P.S: Hopefully my replacement will be appointed soon and he or she will made contact with some of you shortly.



Ken with the Parade Patron , Charlie Lawson, AKA Jim McDonald

On Saturday 17th August, the NIVA held a parade in Wallace Park, Lisburn, to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Troops being deployed in NI to support the civil power. It was a day to commemorate and honour the sacrifice made by many to prevent this country falling into anarchy. Approximately 1,500 Veterans from all Services (including members from the Rol) and many thousands of spectators took part. I remarked many members from our partner organisations present as Veterans or spectators. SEFF and AfIV had an information tent and a large number of visitors in the course of the day took time to converse with the AfIV staff.



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear Member,

This month our Newsletter contains two very personal statements from two of our Advocates. We are unfortunately losing Aitor who is moving to a role working with the homeless; we wish him well and he will be very much missed within AfIV. He very quickly fitted into the organisation, and I've no doubt will also slip seamlessly into his new role. We hope he keeps in touch.

Ann, who is not long back after a period of sickness, talks very personally on her recent struggles. Mental health problems can effect us all, and if you or anyone you know needs support, please ensure you make contact with someone who can help you receive the help you need. SEFF and all our partner organisations have access to the professionals who can help you in an empathetic and confidential manner. I applaud Ann for being so open with what she had to say.

There are other changes within AfIV. Due to FRPU losing their funding, SEFF applied to take on the Advocacy Support in that area and were successful. Alan Lewis and Ian Irwin, previous Advocates for FRPU, will now be AfIV staff members. AfIV have now opened a new office in Bessbrook, South Armagh. In association with the changes, Pete Murtagh was successful in an interview and will step up as an additional Advocacy manager. A further application process resulted in Rachel Glover returning as a Research and Admin. Assistant for AfIV.

A diary showing the location of all the AfIV staff is on another page.

We still await a decision from the NIO on the way ahead following the Legacy Consultation and their recent press release that briefly summarised the responses. Leadership is required and it is hoped that the new Secretary of State can provide that as it is sorely lacking.

The AfIV team will continue to support you in your quest for truth, justice and acknowledgement.

Yours Faithfully

Ken Funston

Advocacy Support Manager



The Republic of Ireland MUST be held accountable

For too long the Republic of Ireland has stood idly by as Northern Ireland battles with the continuing fallout from forty plus years of terrorist violence, during the recent consultation into the proposed legacy institutions officials successfully manufactured an illusion of involvement and joint partnership, much like a couple who have guests over to visit, the wife cooks the meal, the husband puts away the dishes while claiming equal ownership of what was served. It’s an unavoidable reality that once again the Republic of Ireland has failed victims while also failing to grasp the reality of what is required to right their many wrongs.

The International cooperation bill is held up as a shining example of North-South cooperation, upon closer examination there is little in terms of substance. Irish politicians claim that the twelve page bill enables the transfer of information to Northern Ireland based inquests, they claim the bill legislates for mechanisms in which members of An Garda Siochana can lawfully provide evidence and answer queries posed by a British coroner, both these statements are false, the transfer of information and or documentation will not take place if the Garda commissioner concludes that doing so would “*be likely to prejudice the sovereignty, security or other essential interests of the state*” secondly no Garda personnel would ever leave the Republic of Ireland, if a request for a Garda witness is received the Garda Commissioner will then request that an Irish judge be appointed to put pre-arranged questions to the witness, there would be absolutely no input from a UK coroner, No UK barrister, No cross examination and no accountability, an exercise of complete delusion and illusion.

Some may have been fooled but SEFF stands with victims both North and South, they deserve better, they deserve to be taken seriously, there needs to be proper and substantial resourcing of legacy investigations, backed up with meaningful legislation, victims who thought the International Cooperation bill would break the mould have been left bitterly disappointed.

There are many reasons why the legacy institutions proposed by Stormont House will not work, none more so than the fact that the Republic of Ireland's involvement has been minimal, to the point of dismissive. It is well documented that Provisional IRA units used and abused the border, moving into Northern Ireland to commit murder and perpetuate mayhem before slipping back south for their evening meal. Weapons were smuggled into the Republic which then made their way to Northern Ireland. It is completely legitimate for SEFF to continue to lobby the Irish Government, requesting that they recognise and accept that there will never be satisfactory investigate accountability around the 'Troubles' until both Governments agree to collectively and co-equally share the burden of responsibility, ever mindful that 90% of 'Troubles' related deaths were murders committed by Republican and Loyalist terrorists.

Yours,
Alan Lewis
South Armagh and South Down Advocate

Advocacy Office Roster					
SEFF Offices	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Main Office, Lisnaskea	WRW	Ken/Rachel	WRW	Ian	WRW/Rachel
West Tyrone Gateway Service, Newtownstewart	H & WB	H & WB/ WRW	Ken	Welfare/ WRW	Ian
South Down Gateway Service, Rathfriland	Pete/ ERW	Pete	Alan	Alan	ERW
South Armagh Gateway Service	Ian/Alan	Alan/Ann	Pete/Ian/ Ann	Pete/Rachel	Alan
Other Groups	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Decorum NI			ERW	ERW	
MUVE		Ian (Fortnightly)			
South & East Tyrone Welfare Support	Ken	Ian (Fortnightly)			
RFCA		ERW			
ROI	Ann	n/a		Ann	Ann
Effective from 27th August, subject to change and further recruitment of 1 or 2 Advocacy Support Workers (ERW & WRW)					
Health & Well Being Case Worker	H & WB				
East Region Advocacy Support Worker (when recruited)	ERW				
West Region Advocacy Support Worker (if recruited)	WRW				
Rachels Hours					
Tuesday 9am-4.30pm					
Thursday 10am-4.30pm					
Friday 9am-4.30pm					

The World can be a Difficult Place

In the early hours of the 19th April 2019, I heard the news that a very close friend of mine, Lyra McKee, had been shot and murdered by the IRA (so called New), in Londonderry. She had been observing a riot and standing where she thought she would be safe, beside a PSNI land rover.

To say I was in shock is too mild. I had only spoken to Lyra four days previously. She had passed on some information that she had heard regarding my sister Mary's murder. She was always listening out for snippets to give me. We discussed her impending proposal to her girlfriend, her book on the Rev Robert Bradford and how it was finished, my new car, which she desperately wanted to drive, and arranged to meet for lunch to celebrate my birthday once she returned from New York. I can still hear her voice in my head.

For some months before her murder, I could feel anxiety build in me. All of us who have lost a loved one in traumatic, violent circumstances can identify with having days that you cannot face talking to people or having days when you just want to sleep, never to waken up. Work becomes more difficult to concentrate on and the simplest task feels like a mountain. All of these feelings can be triggered by various environmental factors. When the news broke that my gentle, kind and at times naive friend was so cruelly killed and in such a violent way, similar to my own sister being murdered on a dirty street, that was it. I could no longer function. All I wanted to do was sleep. Never wanted to waken up, the world seemed like such a cruel place and no matter how much we tried to put good into it, the baddies always seemed to come up smelling of the sweetest roses. I was physically and emotionally exhausted. *'Burnt out.'*

I was broken and thought there was no future for me. Fortunately I have a wonderful supportive husband and children, along with supportive employers and work colleagues who gave me time to gather myself and heal. Who listened as I wept and had patience as I lay in bed or walked around the house unwashed and still wearing my pyjamas. I went to my doctor and asked for help. He has known me for 22 years and told me he had never seen me so bad. I was put on anti-depressants, told I could not possibly work, and started seeing a counsellor once a week.

I went onto sick leave and remained on it for 12 weeks. On the 15th July, I started back to work and with the support of my manager and colleagues at SEFF, I am taking things slowly. I still get panic attacks, I still do not believe in myself and have trouble with concentration and sometimes performing small tasks but I am getting better and just knowing that I can speak openly with my colleagues and that they have "my back" is worth a million pounds. Mental Health must not be kept secret. Do not be afraid to ask for help. It is okay to not be okay.

My Fondest Regards,

Ann Travers

The 'Victims' Commissioner

The Victims Commissioner, Judith Thompson, released a prepared statement on Tuesday 20th following the announcement by the DUP that they had lost confidence in her. She said the following at 8.10am the following day on Good Morning Ulster. *"I represent the greater swath of people who suffered harm."*

May I suggest that is untrue, the IVU organisation representing 23 victims' groups (including a group in the RoI), the N.I Retired Police Officers Association, Ulster Human Rights Watch, Docklands Victims Association and the Orange Order have all clearly stated that the Commissioner does not represent their views in support of victims and survivors whom they serve. This is not meant to come across as a 'head count' but we simply want Mrs Thompson to be realistic and acknowledge there are a lot of victims and survivors who have lost confidence in her.

On Good Morning Ulster, the Commissioner was asked by Noel Thompson if she was going to continue in her role as she had lost the support of a large section of the victims and survivors community. She replied, *"I absolutely intend to continue to carry on doing my job which is to represent and advance the best interests of all victims and survivors within the law that I operate in."* It appears that for whatever reason, she seems incapable of acknowledging that she does not do so.

Dame Vera Baird, is the current Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales and is appointed by Government ministers but is *"independent of Government and free to advise, challenge and offer her own views"* and to *"highlight what is and isn't working."* This was taken from the Commission's website,

<https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/victims-commissioner/> Why therefore does Mrs Thompson continually hide behind the current definition of a victim when she claims there is 'no moral equivalence between the victim and the perpetrator'? Why is she not advising the Government and challenging the legislation unless she agrees with it?

When the Commissioner was questioned by Noel Thompson about the renewal of her contract which is due shortly, she replied. *"If I'm offered I will take it."* That could possibly leave us with a Commissioner who is without mandate from the very victims and survivors to whom she is charged to advocate on behalf. Even in her desperation to hold on to her job, she continues to ignore the concerns of many, many people.

In the Commissioner's prepared statement that she released on Tuesday she stated, *"The work towards continuing peace and reconciliation has to be uncomfortable for everyone."* I find that statement condescending and potentially harmful to victims and survivors. The role of the Commissioner should be to make things less difficult for those she supposedly represents. Why should it be uncomfortable for the innocent? We did not deserve what happened to us, yet she suggests we should 'share the load' created by the terrorist. It is not a communal responsibility, we were not in anyway to blame for what happened to us. The analogy is that the female wearing a short skirt is partly to blame for being attacked, something that no-one can agree with.

The statement actually proves that the Commissioner has lost touch with reality.