

The Real Victims

So often we hear the media discuss how to deal with legacy issues, and with us, the “victims”. These debates can lead to many of us shouting at the radio, wishing that the commentators would listen to us.

At the moment I’m off work sick after having a dodgy knee replaced and with plenty of time on my hands to listen to and read these discussions. I often wonder do the media really think about who they have on to discuss what is best for victims? Instead of lining people up with links to political parties or terrorist groups, why not also include those directly affected in the debate and who have a real life experience insight? Then perhaps the real issues and needs of those affected by terrorism would be dealt with efficiently. Without us using our voices within the media we risk the romanticising of terrorism and their goals to become the norm, plus we make it more difficult to put pressure on the Government and their agencies to supply adequate funding to investigate and prosecute, as well as adequate support for victims.

Recently in the news I have read about IRA enactments, the Chair Person of Fermanagh and Omagh district Council refusing to condemn the murder of innocents at Enniskillen and only at the weekend the attendance of Donegal Mayor Gerry McMonagle, listed as an “on the run” in 2003, doing a walkabout with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, during an official visit to Londonderry. All of these events are triggers for victims, the years may have past but the grief and trauma remains, combined with the thoughts that the officials who should protect us, just don’t care.

We need to get our voices and stories out there, so that we get the acknowledgement, truth and justice that our loved ones, ourselves and indeed society deserves. Only by putting our truth into the public domain will we be able to educate those who haven’t experienced what it is like to have your life abruptly and violently changed forever, concentrating not only on the event but the years afterwards and our resilience to move forward and live our lives as best we can.

When loss or serious illness is experienced, the importance of living life to the full is even more apparent. Often victims and those speaking out on behalf of them get accused of living in the past, that couldn’t be any further from the truth but when you have witnessed the murder of your loved one or colleague, or witnessed a family member lying on a dirty street, it’s impossible to forget. So when we hear commentators’ talking about dealing with the past as though we, the victims, are preventing the future, and see the PSNI doing little to prevent IRA re-enactments and not arresting people on the run suspected of murder, then it is no wonder that at times we feel disheartened

It is not good enough that the excuse of lack of resources, and political deadlock is preventing Government agencies from doing their job. They have a duty of care to respond quickly and efficiently to requests and inquiries into past incidents. We need to use the media to our advantage to get this message across, putting pressure on, and embarrass internationally if necessary, those decision makers that have left victims of the troubles in limbo.

Together we are stronger and the more we use our voices on behalf of ourselves and our loved ones then the more we will get results.

Here at SEFF, we in the Advocacy Service are more than happy to support you and raise issues on your behalf, please don’t hesitate to contact us. Don’t feel despair or frustrated, you are not alone.

Ann Travers



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear Member,

My role within SEFF and of course AfIV is as the Advocacy Manager, however I don’t think I’ve been doing enough managing. The Advocacy Newsletter must be fresh and worth reading, with the views of the rest of the Advocacy Team, so I will take great pleasure in managing their inputs to this Newsletter, and less of my usual drivel. I also encourage any of you, as members to forward me your thoughts, good bad or indifferent. I want to hear if the advocacy service has helped or empowered you, or if it has been a bad experience, we need to know. Your anonymity will be respected if you wish to input your views.

The recent SEFF service was held in Fivemiletown Methodist Church, and it was uplifting to see so many like-minded people who found it was a rewarding experience. I was also heartened to see quite a few of the good people—you—who have engaged directly with the AfIV Advocacy Service.

Ann Travers continues to recuperate from home following her knee-replacement surgery. We continue to wish her well in her recovery. As you can see from this Newsletter, the pain from her knee has not affected the power of her pen.

We very much encourage you to continue to engage with AfIV and inspire others who may need our assistance. Not everyone wants their own personal/family case reopened. It might be a more simple matter such as writing a letter to the authorities or engaging with a statutory body. Even if you are unsure as to what exactly we can do for you, do not hesitate to contact us and we can talk things through. It will always be very much driven by your needs and how you want to take things forward.

Kind Regards,

Ken



Peter Murtagh Work Update

This has been a month with plenty of variety. I've attended a number of meetings for various Victims related issues, and with other groups; such as South Down Action for Healing Wounds, Rathfriland UDR Association and Bangor Probus (a local business group in Bangor). At these I have given presentations relating to Advocacy Support Work, generally getting the message across what our service can offer victims. I have also attended meetings with the Chairman of the Police Federation Mark Lindsay and a presentation given by the Attorney General in relation to inquests; the latter we will be looking to follow up to try and address the issue of 'Open Verdicts', this had been initiated by Ann Travers. I have also been engaging with a number of new victims that have come forward to avail of Advocacy Support."

Regards

Pete

Yasmin's Recent Activity

In my first couple of months working with GB – based victims and survivors I have noticed how so many continue to suffer, as a result of the trauma and/or loss in their lives. Many survivors say that years ago they were told "time is a healer". I am now told by countless people that this is not true. This is a myth. In reality, healing requires constant work and consciousness, which is why SEFF's holistic approach has already started to have a positive impact on a number of GB-based victim's lives. Up to now I have found that a positive sense of wellbeing makes it possible to pursue advocacy related issues. Similarly, seeking to acknowledge or obtain truth/justice around the legacy of the past, may improve one's overall health, purpose and drive.

Kind Regards

Yasmin

Wendy's Update

This has been another busy month. I have been out on the road quite a bit to visit victims who have requested help from the Advocacy service. These visits have resulted in much contact with PSNI Legacy Investigation Branch, Serious Crime Branch, Public Records Office, etc. Earlier this month I attended the Advocacy Service Induction Day in Dungannon. This was organised by VSS and was a great opportunity to meet other Advocacy Support Workers based within other victims' organisations. It is reassuring to hear that they are having the same difficulties as me with regard to the slow response from PSNI departments when information is requested on behalf of victims and survivors.

A couple of other highlights over the last month include an excellent first aid training day, and also being part of the Remembrance Service at the start of the month. Finally, just to update you on my work base. Although I am based in Lisnaskea, I also cover West Tyrone. So, from 15th November onwards, I will be based in the offices of West Tyrone Voice in Newtown Stewart every Wednesday. On those days I'll be available to see people in the office, or to do home visits in the area.

Regards

Wendy

A Level Playing Field

I think as an advocate for a victims' organisation I have to look at everything holistically and not through a narrow, prejudiced viewpoint. A recent Belfast Telegraph article allows us to see inside the mind of those who do not appear to look at things from a neutral viewpoint. It almost appears that we have to continually revisit the same narrative in order to explain the overriding issues, and once again clarify the realities.

Ann Cadwallader of the Pat Finucane Centre, in the Telegraph article, refers to the '*Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement*', they stand for who exactly? The title almost makes one believe that it represents everyone, it certainly has made no representation on behalf of Innocent Victims United, an organisation with many thousands of a combined membership. Kenny Donaldson has now challenged them to hear our views. This Committee is actually an amalgam of representatives of the Dail Eireann, including Sinn Fein, who profess to know what's best for us. Ms Cadwallader complained to them about the non-availability of £10m funding for 56 cases, whilst most of us had to make do with an hour in an open court. This is the hierarchy system that makes many, many other victims' families despair. It also gives us greater understanding of the republican thought process, any case with state involvement must be funded to the full, whilst everyone else must make do. Yet terrorism in this country caused 90% of all deaths.

Ms Cadwallader also criticised demands from some politicians for an "amnesty" for members of the Army who were involved in Troubles related killings. Members of the Security Forces do not want, nor have asked for amnesties. What they do demand is fairness and equality of treatment. If someone wearing a uniform has committed a crime they should expect the full rigours of the Law, but not a witch hunt. They do not want amnesties that the terrorists have availed of wholesale. Many hundreds of them getting early release from prison, many more receiving royal prerogatives of mercy and so-called letters of 'comfort.' None of these are available to retired members of the security forces, nor do they want them. They never wish to be equated to the terrorists who destroyed this country.

Later in this article, Fianna Fail Senator Mark Daly said the UK Government must be pressurised into tackling the legacy issue. Yes, legacy needs full British and Irish government support but it must be on a level playing field. The Irish government have been found wanting throughout and are very quick to point the finger at the British. Mr Daly from Fianna Fáil should know better than most, it was his party who were mostly in power when the IRA used his country as a safe haven.

Please understand I would never wish any victim to be deprived of a thorough inquiry/investigation, I just want it done fairly.

Ken