

Sluggie O'Toole ran a three-part series on the blog covering the issue of on-line abuse. Some of the comments from contributors highlighted the extent of the issue, with the level of irony lost on some of them. One stated,



"If you are putting your opinions online, you have to expect to be challenged in such a public forum. If you can't accept that then the medium isn't for you."

Another stated, "Frankly it was an ill-advised move given the toxic element to Twitter" in relation to the abuse another victim received, whilst yet another claimed that, "they aren't really that offensive, are they?"

We therefore have to consider that other people's standards may not meet our own, and vile abuse is considered normal to many. It also suggests that people think it is okay on social media to challenge you in whatever form they wish if they disagree with your views. Indeed Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg only recently defended what he claimed was 'free speech' - anything goes. They have had to change their stance due to the deterioration of online behaviour, but will 'police' Facebook in a way that meets their views.



You therefore have to consider individually whether social media is right for you. Some people find it of great benefit whilst others hold it in abhorrence. It will also suit those who oppose your views if they can intimidate you away from it. What is even more worrisome is the time spent by those who are forensicly analysing every comment, and if there is an opening, you will be threatened with litigation. I even wonder if I have inadvertently written something on here that will leave me open to challenge. Everything we write has to be checked, and checked again.

Life and society very quickly have changed beyond recognition, and our laws must change accordingly. In the past, we watched TV and listened to the radio without any direct input, whereas now the audience has shifted from passive to active participants with our social media input. Professor David Ormerod QC, the commissioner for criminal law recently stated that,

"As the internet and social media have become an everyday part of our lives, online abuse has become commonplace for many." He continued, "We have identified areas of the criminal law most in need of reform in order to protect victims and hold perpetrators to account."

Maybe there will be some equilibrium in how social media is policed and it will become a safe place for all. It's as RDE said at the end of her column, "Don't lose heart, Ken. Free speech is on the ropes, but if those who value it stand together, it can be revived." We must strive to do so.



Ken Funston

Recruitment process connected with Ken's departure

SEFF Management are currently examining options around this particular issue and we will strive to come up with a response which ensures that the service we provide for beneficiaries meets their needs, this will inevitably require a level of restructuring of the service. Further details will be advised in an upcoming Edition of the AfIV N'letter.



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear All

It is with a heavy heart that I announce I will be resigning my position as an Advocacy Manager, and I will be leaving my employment with SEFF on 31st December 2020. I have been performing the role of an Advocacy Manager for five and a half years, and I feel it is time that someone fresh moves into the position. The nature of the job is very demanding and I believe it is time that I took a step back.

During my time in the advocacy role, I have met some amazing people, and listened to many tragic life-lived experiences. I have to congratulate such individuals on their resilience and determination in pursuing truth, justice and acknowledgement. These experiences never leave us, and they have shaped our lives.

This for me wasn't just a job, it was a vocation, and I was determined to assist and help make people's lives better. I hope in most cases I have achieved that. The people I have worked with during the five and half years were not simply 'clients', they have become my friends and that has made my life so much richer.

Due to the role of Advocacy Manager, I have had to attend meetings where I have encountered people who have been outwardly antagonistic. At times the level of hatred displayed was shocking because they had a different viewpoint to me and other SEFF representatives; I will not miss those people at all. What was rewarding in these meetings was countering their biased narrative.

I will continue to be a member of SEFF, an absolutely marvelous organisation with great leadership and staff, and a membership of fantastic people. I will continue to assist when called upon if I am in a position to do so.

I would also like to thank the organisations and staff that make up IVU for their friendship, support & encouragement over the years.

Yours sincerely,

Ken Funston



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The Act of Remembrance



**“When you go Home, tell them of us and say, say,
For your Tomorrow, we gave our Today”**

John Maxwell Edmunds, 1916.



One of the most challenging elements of the ongoing pandemic has been the limits that it has placed on our ability to come together to commemorate the memory and service of our loved ones. These challenging times have allowed us the unique opportunity to reflect on the profoundly personal elements we feel during the solemn act of remembrance.

In my brief time at SEFF, I have been deeply moved by the testimony of the men, women and children who have had their lives forever changed during the Troubles. The grace and dignity of victims and their families continues to be an inspiration to me. Their stories act as a daily reminder to me of the importance of our work and our duty to highlight the lives, personalities, and characters of innocent victims.

While the pandemic may have deprived us of the opportunity to comfort those who mourn at this time of year, this period of remembrance acts as an essential reminder of our communities' responsibility to support each other. While we cannot show our solidarity with families in a conventional manner this year, we will continue to honour the memory and sacrifices of the wider SEFF family. Our advocacy team remains committed to supporting victims and their families during these challenging times in any way we can. COVID-19 may have changed a lot in our day-to-day lives, but it cannot stop us from commemorating our loved ones in a dignified manner. The pandemic cannot prevent us from ensuring that the memory of innocent victims lives on.

What remembrance means to me:

During an evening walk last week, I smiled as I saw a mother sternly reminding her children to look both ways before crossing the road. It was a moment that took me back to my childhood where I was frequently reminded that it was more important to look left and right when crossing the road than to look up to the skies.

But throughout my childhood, looking up to heavens to see the helicopters traversing the skies of South Armagh was life for me. It has always made me smile to see children standing excitedly on their tiptoes waiting for a parent to arrive home. For me as helicopters moved from base to base, I would happily tell myself that my father was in every one of those helicopters as he served in the Royal Irish Regiment. It was an incredible source of comfort to wave at every passing helicopter and feel that he could see my support for him.

Since starting my role at SEFF, engaging with the local community and thus deepening my understanding of their experiences of 'The Troubles' I now have a wider insight of what the community faced in South Armagh. I've been moved by the resilience of countless innocents who were forced to accept the tragic reality that terrorists viewed the bus or car that they were traveling in as a legitimate target.



Having been raised in the local area, I have come to appreciate the sacrifices that families made in their daily lives. It has been a genuine privilege to engage with the local community and understand their experience as I work to promote SEFF's message that the innocent victims of terrorism are entitled to truth, justice, and acknowledgement. Their testimony is invaluable as we strive to develop a comprehensive picture of the past for future generations which puts the experience of innocent victims at the heart of the narrative.

Though remembrance will take many different forms this year, it remains important for us to reflect on the work we do and the people we serve in our local communities. However you choose to remember your loved ones this year, each and every one of you will remain in my thoughts and prayers.

Bethany Ferris

(South Armagh-based Advocacy Support worker)

The Death of Free Speech

I recently was tagged by Ruth Dudley-Edwards (RDE) in a Facebook debate in relation to free speech. She later quoted me in her News Letter article with these comments I had previously made:

“It's got to the stage that people are afraid to say anything in case they get sued, Ruth. And that is the plan. Close down all opposition; free speech has gone.”

This debate came about in response to RDE posting a link in relation to the fact that solicitors for Margaret Campbell have issued pre-action correspondence following disparaging comments made about her. Mrs Campbell's husband Patrick was murdered by the UVF near Banbridge in 1973. Mr Campbell was an innocent victim of sectarian murder. The Irish News recently quoted Mrs Campbell's solicitor who stated,

“Commentators need to be very careful when blithely commenting on the lived experience and trauma of bereaved families.”

I have not seen or heard what these comments were, but any type of abuse, whether direct or indirect, is never acceptable. SEFF and the wider membership of the IVU groups are consistent in something of this nature. We would never condone using any type of language that is potentially damaging or hurtful to relatives of the dead. That includes relatives of those who were involved in acts of terrorism.

However, it appears that there are others who do not have this standard of ethics, and it gives the impression that some victims are classed as 'fair game'; they are the 'wrong type of victim.' Let me use my friend, colleague and SEFF member Ann Travers to illustrate this. Ann has been the subject of continual abuse ever since she was brave enough to challenge the appointment of Mary McArdle to a Sinn Fein 'special advisor's post.'

Ms McArdle had been previously convicted of the murder of Ann's sister Mary. RDE also highlighted this in her article, mentioning the disgusting abuse Ann regularly receives. Unfortunately, she is not alone; I could mention many other cases of abuse but I do not have the permission of those victims to highlight them here. But I do not see a queue of human rights lawyers knocking on their doors, and offering support.