



Northern Ireland: Trauma and the Path Toward Healing in Rural and Urban Communities

Corrymeela at Ballycastle; Ballynafeigh Community House, Belfast and Shankill Stress and Trauma Group, Belfast

Project Goals

- ◆ Work with a team to create a safe environment in which individuals can shed barriers of mistrust and fear
- ◆ Use drama, dance, music, and the visual arts to help others find a vehicle for self expression and growth
- ◆ Examine the role of ecumenical prayer sessions in creating a unified religious community

Personal Goals

- ◆ Participate in the transformation of Northern Irish society by operating on an individual level
- ◆ Understand the complexities of the region's history and the roots of the conflict
- ◆ Build lasting, meaningful friendships

Activities

- ◆ At Corrymeela, I worked intensively with groups of all ages and religious backgrounds, planning and leading art workshops, theatrical performances, team building in the outdoors, relaxation classes, and ecumenical prayer
- ◆ At the Ballynafeigh Community House, I worked with children in a religiously integrated neighborhood, designing and leading music and visual art workshops

in which children confronted symbols (such as drums and mural paintings) charged with the Northern Ireland culture of violence

- ◆ At the Shankill Stress and Trauma Group, I reunited with a youth group with which I worked at Corrymeela. I was immersed in the lives of these extraordinary youths, organizing social activities and listening to their stories

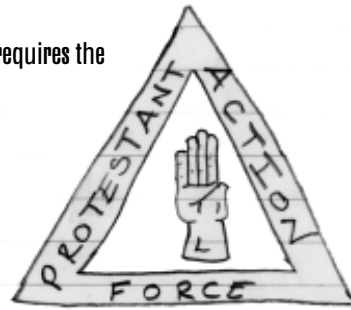
Key Dilemmas

- ◆ How much can really be accomplished in two months, or even two years? Can I really make a substantive difference?
- ◆ Are grassroots organizations effective if vast structural inequity still exists?
- ◆ Is it possible or desirable to demystify violence in the eyes of children by taking them to an army base or a shooting range? Does this simply desensitize them to killing and romanticize war?



Important Learnings

- ◆ Despite the complicated feelings that arise from entrenched conflict, individuals have immense power to connect with one another on a meaningful, person-to-person level and effect incremental change.
- ◆ Even a small contribution is an important part of the whole effort toward reconciliation; no activity is insignificant.
- ◆ Coexistence and reconciliation is not an isolated activity; it requires the coordinated efforts of every aspect of society.



Page 14, left: Mural painting on the walls of the Ballynateigh Community Center. Traditionally a Northern Irish vehicle for perpetuating the culture of violence, these young children reclaim mural painting as an instrument for peace. Page 15, above: "Our revenge will be the laughter of our children" —Bobby Sands. These young boys on the Catholic Falls Road of West Belfast are not laughing. Running past this memorial to the first Republican hunger striker to die for his cause, the children chant sectarian Republican songs with clenched fists. Above right: Getting a taste of army life: spooning violence in to the mouths of children—a fieldtrip with 11-14 year olds from the Ballynateigh Community Center summer program to the local military base. Normalizing the presence of violence in the Northern Irish context or demystifying the "ugly monster" of war? Right: Self-Portraits: imagining your best self. An art workshop at the Ballynateigh Community House with the 4-6 year olds.

