A Day of Reflection: Moving Forward

On the 21st of September, HTR’s Day of Reflection Sub Group held a conference entitled ‘A Day of Reflection: Moving Forward’ at the Market Place Theatre in Armagh. The conference was an important opportunity to discuss the issues, challenges and benefits of the initiative, and to consider the future for the Day. The conference was also a chance to share local knowledge and experiences and to contribute to the wider debate on dealing with the past.

Now in its fourth year, the Day of Reflection is offered as a day for personal, private and individual reflection, for example, at home or at work, within a family, group or organisation. The Sub Group decided to hold the conference on the 21st of September, the International Day of Peace, to mark the next phase of the initiative.

Harold Good chaired the event, and members of the Sub Group gave delegates some background to the Day, its purpose, principles and values. Sara Templer (Evaluator of the Day of Reflection 2009) and Denis Anderson (Fieldworker for the Day of Reflection 2010) highlighted the learning HTR has gained in promoting the Day of Private Reflection over the last number of years, and focused

The AGM was held on the 28th September. The Board of Directors were elected, and the Annual Report for 2009 was circulated. A discussion was held about restructuring the organisation and at the time, the Board were considering this and asking for feedback. Following the AGM, a Members’ Council meeting was held. The structure of the organisation and possible policy changes were discussed further. The next meeting is due to be held in December. For copies of the annual report, contact Claire Smith on 9023 8844 or email claire@healingthroughremembering.org.

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A Day of Reflection: Local Scoping Study

Storytelling as the Vehicle? Conference Report

International Experiences of Days of Remembrance and Reflection

Storytelling Audit: An audit of personal story, narrative and testimony initiatives related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.
the discussion on issues to consider going forward. A short film was also shown, which gave a range of diverse views on the Day, from people who mark the Day individually, to representatives of community groups who organise events on or around the 21st of June.

After mid-morning break, delegates divided into discussion groups to consider the following issues:
- Who - Should HTR still manage it? Should politicians/unions/churches be more involved? Should HTR hold an event?
- How - Should HTR be more prescriptive about activities? Should it remain a private day? Should it be day of Reconciliation? Should it be a holiday?
- Where - Is it still needed? Should it be phased out or stepped up?

Joanna McMinn closed the conference, drawing together the main themes that had emerged over the course of the day’s discussions. These included the value, the promotion, and leadership of the Day of Reflection, the role of HTR and strategic questions that should be considered to enable the initiative to move forward. Joanna acknowledged that the issue was sensitive and complex, and thanked the delegates for their contribution. The feedback from delegates and those involved in the film will in turn shape the future plans for the Day of Reflection.

Whatever You Say, Say Something (WYSSS) Update

WYSSS offers in-depth opportunities for conversations considering wide-ranging issues around dealing with the past by providing trained facilitators to work with groups or organisations. HTR currently has 15 trained Delivery Partners, based in different areas in Northern Ireland and the border counties. 45 conversational workshops have been delivered to date. Workshops have been delivered to a diverse range of individuals and groups. Examples of workshops that have taken place include protestant working class communities in Protestant graves. The personal stories highlighted the rich and diverse history of the city of Belfast and included people involved in the World Wars, industry, education, the arts, sport, people from the Jewish and rural groups and cross community schools work.

Groups agree their own descriptor of themselves which is recorded by the Delivery Partner. Participants record that they feel more informed about the issues and they welcome the opportunity to hear other perspectives which differ from their own as the following comments show:
- “The Workshop has given me a better grasp of some of the perspectives I have to consider”
- “I would be less quick to box people in and be more open to consider others’ viewpoints”
- “If we all dealt with the past we may have a future for all generations”
- “The Workshop was helpful in listening to other people and what they thought”
- “It made me remember I’m not alone in my experiences of what happened during the Troubles”

Muslim communities, and people involved in the conflict. There was a general consensus from the group that the tour had been very informative and interesting, prompting much discussion at the subsequent meeting. Tom talked about the way in which visiting a cemetery can challenge prejudice and help people to come to terms with the complexities of their shared history. If you are interested in

Touring Belfast City Cemetery

In October the Living Memorial Museum Sub Group toured Belfast City Cemetery, guided by historian Tom Hartley. Tom gave a fascinating insight to the many Victorian graves, including the lives of the people buried there and the use of symbols and different carvings on the headstones. The group was able to see the underground wall that runs nine feet deep, built to divide Catholic and Protestant graves. The personal stories highlighted the rich and diverse history of the city of Belfast and included people involved in the World Wars, industry, education, the arts, sport, people from the Jewish and

Do Historians Help or Hinder?

The first of what it is hoped will be a series of seminars on topics linked to the Decade of Commemorations, was held on November 26th at HTR. The speaker was Dr Ian McBride from the Department of History at King’s College, London. Dr McBride explained that historians were increasingly in demand from all areas of the media to explain historical events. Although they are good at explaining events and putting them into context he said, historians are not good healers because they disagree about almost everything.

He explained that there is no set historical narrative, because it is hard to step outside the community or the time we live in. Interpretations change through time, one of the examples he gave was changing views on Sir Roger Casement and his Black Diaries. Ian explained that because historians today need to publish internationally, this can help to revise the dominant narrative. Historians help us to understand the past.

The initial responses to Ian’s talk were given by Dr Laurence McKeown, an writer and playwright and former republican prisoner and Karen McCartney from the Ulster People’s College. Karen delivers the People’s History Initiative. When the discussion was opened up to the floor there was a lively debate on various topics, including the history of the ordinary man, how history is taught in schools and the difficulties and discomfort we have in dealing with very recent history.