



COMMISSION FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS RESPONSE TO THE SAFEGUARDING BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2022

The Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland (CVSNI) was established in June 2008 under the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (2008).

CVSNI is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the Executive Office with the principal aim of promoting awareness of the interests of victims and survivors of the Troubles. It has a number of statutory duties that include:

- Promoting an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors and of the need to safeguard those interests;
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors;
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for the victims and survivors by bodies or persons;
- Advising the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and any Body or person providing services for victims and survivors on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors;
- Ensuring that the views of victims and survivors are sought concerning the exercise of CVSNI's functions; and
- Making arrangements for a forum for consultation and discussion with victims and survivors.¹

CVSNI welcomes the opportunity to provide a consultation response on the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland's Strategic Plan 2018-2022. Whilst CVSNI is not involved in directly safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, it does recognise the continued impact of legacy issues on the lives of young people and their families.

CVSNI is underpinned by the *Strategy for Victims and Survivors*, which recognises the societal and ongoing impact of the conflict on children and young people.² It is CVSNI's view that children and young people continue to be impacted by our troubled past and this should be understood at strategic and service delivery levels.

¹ The functions of the Commission relate to those set out in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

² OFMDFM (2009), *Strategy for Victims and Survivors*, Office of First and deputy First Minister, p.9.

CVSNI welcomes SBNI's decision to concentrate on Adverse Childhood Experiences to underpin the strategic plan and therefore highlights the need for SBNI to acknowledge the impact that conflict-related incidents have, and continue to have, on children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The inclusion of Strategic Priority 4, which is to provide a voice to children and young people affected by mental health issues, is a very timely one given the need for adequate funding for mental health care provision throughout Northern Ireland. CVSNI and the Victims and Survivors Forum have considered the intergenerational impact of the Troubles and in 2015, CVSNI in partnership with Ulster University produced the research report entitled *Towards a Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*.³ The findings from the research established that the social, political and economic legacy of the conflict was complex, wide ranging and multidimensional.

The report noted that traumatic experiences and exposure to violence can lead to adverse mental health and other consequences not only for the person themselves, but also for their children and potentially, their grandchildren, resulting in a trans-generational cycle which impacts upon the well-being of subsequent generations. Specifically, the effects of violence, traumatic experiences and social segregation impact upon parenting practices which affect early attachment and the capacity of the child to self-regulate. Difficulties with self-regulation increase the person's risk of mental disorders, behavioural problems and suicide. They also affect how that person engages with their own children when they become a parent. The accumulation of childhood toxic stress, resulting from negative parenting behaviours, exposure to violence and the use of harsh punishment, is associated with adverse mental health outcomes.

The research also highlighted that children of survivors of the conflict have been found to have poorer psychological functioning which may be a direct result of the trauma experienced but other indirect factors also play a role. For example, a parent, physically or mentally injured during the Troubles may be unable to care for their child, with eventually the child becoming their parent's carer. Injury also places a large burden on the family in terms of relationship and economic problems. Additionally, trauma may contribute to maladaptive parental behaviour, such as intra-family violence or neglect which subsequently impacts negatively on the child.⁴ Strategic Priority 4 presents

³ CVSNI (2015) *Towards a Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*, Commission for Victims and Survivors.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.33.



an opportunity for SBNI and partners to inform decision makers and practitioners on the impact of conflict legacy.

Another enduring conflict legacy issue is ongoing paramilitary activity that continues to cause many families throughout Northern Ireland significant harm and distress. As an enduring conflict legacy issue, paramilitarism can be viewed as a significant factor perpetuating the trans-generational impact of the Troubles, with serious consequences on mental and physical health. In addition to the routine orchestration of paramilitary style attacks, including on children and young people, attacks on security force personnel, coupled with gun and bomb attacks, reinforces a sense of insecurity and anxiety among many victims and survivors and their families.

CVSNI supports SBNI's continued commitment to partnership working, reflected in the mission, values and strategic priorities set out in this document. Collaborative working ensures good service delivery and sharing of best practice. This is essential for practitioners working with vulnerable people and CVSNI continues to include SBNI as a point of reference in our *Standards for Services Provided to Victims and Survivors*.⁵

As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the wellbeing of a section of our young people continues to be negatively affected by the trans-generational legacy of the Troubles. There is therefore a need to acknowledge the impact that conflict-related incidents continue to on our children and young people.

CVSNI supports SBNI's proposal to adopt a trauma-focused approach to safeguarding, which is underpinned by research. CVSNI has been awarded £250,000 through PEACE IV funding to conduct research into the transgenerational legacy of the troubles and young people and conduct a review of existing trauma services in Northern Ireland. The findings of this research will be shared with all relevant stakeholders on completion, including SBNI with the aim of ensuring services are fit for purpose and underpinning new policy developments in these areas.

CVSNI would emphasise the ongoing impact of the Troubles on children and young people and recommend that SBNI acknowledges the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland and would therefore be pleased to assist SBNI with any conflict-related contextual understanding.

March 2018

⁵ CVSNI (2016) *Standards for Services Provided to Victims and Survivors*, Commission for Victims and Survivors, p.10.