

Victims Liaison Unit

Room 123 Stormont House Annexe

Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3ST

Telephone (01232) 527900 Fax: (01232) 527901 Email: victims@nics.gov.uk

VLU newsletter

Issue 1, January 1999

The Victims Liaison Unit was set up by The Minister for Victims, Mr Adam Ingram MP, To support the Implementation of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's Report "We Will Remember Them" which was published In May 1998

Victims Minister Adam Ingram launches The Educational Bursary Scheme

The Educational Bursary Scheme was officially launched on Friday 8 January 1999 by Victims Minister Adam Ingram. The aim of the Scheme is to assist individuals whose education has been directly affected by their personal experience of the impact of the Troubles. The Bursary, which will operate independently as a pilot scheme, will be Chaired by Lynda Wilson, Director of Children's Services at Barnardo's.

The three criteria for application will be as follows:

1. Personal circumstances

Individuals who have lost a parent or immediate family member, or who have lost a significant 'other' person' as a result of the troubles. Individuals who have been injured with resulting physical and/or psychological effect.

2. Impact of the Troubles

There has been a clear effect on the individual's education - e.g. dropped out of school, lost confidence, needs extra help, lost time.

3. Educational benefits

The applicants must be able to identify a clear link between the money requested and the benefits to their education now -e.g. fees, books, tutoring.

A Selection Panel has been set up to assess applications and assessments will be made by considering the applicant's personal history, the direct effect of their particular experience on their education and the potential benefit of financial assistance to their education now. There is no age limit for those applying. **The deadline for completed applications is 28 February 1999.** It is therefore important that anyone wishing to apply to the Bursary should do so before the **28 February** as applications received after that date can not be considered under this pilot phase.

Barnardo's is assisting the Victims Liaison Unit to administer this Scheme and those seeking application forms or further information should contact either Una McCurdy at Barnardo's on Belfast (01232) 672366 or Kim Burns at the Victims Liaison Unit

The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund

On 23 December 1998 Victims Minister Adam Ingram announced the appointment of the Trustees who will administer the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. The Minister said **"I believe the Memorial Fund marks a further significant step in the process of addressing some of the very real problems faced by many victims and demonstrates the Government's continued commitment to recognise those who have suffered.**

Under the chairmanship of Professor George Bain the Trustees of the fund will be working to make it a reality."

Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Queen's University Vice-Chancellor, Professor George Bain said, **"I am honoured to have been asked to Chair the Board of Trustees for The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. I and my fellow Trustees believe that The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund will offer a unique means of providing support to victims and we will be working together over the coming months to that end."** In conclusion, Professor Bain said: **"It is my hope that The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund will become a 'Living' memorial to those who suffered as a result of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. In this way I believe it reflects the spirit of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's Report."**

Names of the Trustees

- Professor George Bain (Chair), President and Vice-Chancellor, The Queen's University of Belfast;
- Dr John Galway, Retired Consultant Anaesthetist;
- Mrs Celia Gourley, Retired IDB Executive;
- Mr Dennis Licence, Managing Director, First Trust Bank;
- Dr Patrick Haren, Group Chief Executive, Viridian Group plc;
- Mrs Ann Shaw, Chairperson, Institute of Directors;
- Professor Mari Fitzduff, Director, INCORE;
- Reverend Ruth Patterson, Director, Restoration Ministries;
- Ms Kate Kelly, Chairperson, Women's Information Group;

Additional Trustees may be appointed and further details about the fund will be announced over the coming months.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Brendan O'Mahony at the Victims Liaison Unit.

Consultation Exercise on the Bloomfield Report

Following an announcement by Adam Ingram on 30 June 1998, the Victims Liaison Unit launched a 3 month consultation exercise on the recommendations contained in Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report "We Will Remember Them."

The consultation period was due to end on 30 September 1998, but to facilitate the many requests from victims/survivors and victim support groups to meet with representatives from the Victims Liaison Unit, the consultation period was extended to 30 November 1998. During this time staff from the Unit travelled widely to facilitate those victims and their representatives who requested meetings.

The Unit is currently in the process of collating and analysing the many hundreds of contributions received and hope to be in a position to provide further information over the coming weeks. Enquiries should be directed to Mary Butcher at the Victims Liaison Unit.

New Trauma Centre to open its doors next month

A new Trauma Centre which will provide help and support to the many people, particularly young people and their families - who continue to endure the tragic consequences of events in Northern Ireland, is due to open in February 1999.

The Centre will provide a comprehensive therapeutic service to families experiencing trauma, and will be a centre of expertise providing a regional consultation service and training for those involved in this work in both the voluntary and statutory sector.

The decision to make this unit a priority arose not only because of the needs identified in Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report "We Will Remember Them", and the report of the Social Services Inspectorate, "Living with the Trauma of the Troubles," but also because concerns had already been identified by the Young People's Centre, currently the only dedicated adolescent psychiatry service in Northern Ireland, about how the troubles affected young people referred to the unit.

The service will be delivered by a team of family therapists who have backgrounds in a range of mental health professions. The teams will also include sessions from psychology and psychiatry, and all the staff will be trained in systematic family therapy.

The new Trauma Centre is located at 1 Wellington Park, Belfast and will be managed by the South and East Belfast Trust.

Further details can be obtained by contacting either Arlene Healey, Project Manager and Family Therapist on (01232) 661825 or, Mary Butcher at the Victims Liaison Unit.

Political Parties asked to nominate Victims representative

As part of the Victims Liaison Unit's consultation exercise, the Northern Ireland political parties were invited to contribute a formal response to Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report. The Northern

Ireland Women's Coalition was the only political party to do so. Addressing the needs of victims is, of course, an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement and on 19 November 1998 Victims Minister Adam Ingram wrote to the leaders of the new Northern Ireland Assembly parties asking them to nominate a representative to speak for their party on victims issues. When details of all the nominees have been received the Minister intends to meet the representatives in order to discuss measures to help victims.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Billy Stevenson at the Victims Liaison Unit.

Compensation Review Body continues to gather evidence

Since the Review Body began its work in September 1998, it has been inviting individuals, voluntary groups and other interested organisations to submit their views regarding the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Chaired by the former Victims Commissioner Sir Kenneth Bloomfield and assisted by Mrs Marion Gibson, Manager of Staff Care Services and Crisis Counselling Team Co-ordinator with the South & East Belfast Social Services Trust, and Desmond Greer, Professor of Common Law at Queen's University, Belfast, the Review body will advise Government on the "fitness for purpose" of the criminal injury compensation arrangements in Northern Ireland in the light of the experiences of those who have suffered during the last 30 years of violence in Northern Ireland, and on how any shortcomings in the arrangements identified in the course of the review might be rectified for the future.

The Review Body was particularly interested to hear at first hand from those victims who had experience of the Criminal Injury Compensation Scheme and hosted a series of semi-public meetings organised by WAVE, throughout Northern Ireland .

To facilitate the response the closing date for submissions was extended to Christmas 1998.

The Review body has now embarked on a further round of meetings with interested groups both here and in the rest of the UK, but until this evidence gathering process has been completed and the team has had a chance to review the information gathered, it is impossible to speculate on what recommendations of the Review body might be. The team was asked by the Government to report by March 1999. It now seems unlikely that this deadline will be met, however, the Review body's aim is certainly to report later in the Spring.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Amanda Johnston on Belfast (01232) 258814.

VLU commission Survey of Support Groups

The Victims Liaison Unit has commissioned The Cost of the Troubles Study to conduct a survey of organisations currently serving those bereaved and injured in the Troubles. The Project Director, Marie Smyth together with the project's Research Officer Gráinne Kelly, have distributed over 100 questionnaires to support groups throughout Northern Ireland and the details gathered will provide a comprehensive base of information about existing organisations and the services they provide, that will assist the development of Government policy in this area.

Further information can be obtained by contacting: Gráinne Kelly on Belfast (01232) 747470 or

Billy Stevenson at the Victims Liaison Unit.

Grants to Community and Voluntary Groups

The elderly and housebound, the young and the disabled were just some of the groups that benefited from grants to the community and voluntary sector. WAVE, Survivors of Trauma, Disability Action and the Shankill Stress Centre each received grants to develop pilot schemes and provide additional befriending and support services.

Speaking at the Survivors of Trauma Centre, Victims Minister Adam Ingram said, "**The funding for pilot schemes will help to ensure that new innovative proposals are tailored specifically to meet the needs of local communities.**"

£200,000 Community Group Fund to be allocated

The £200,000 community group fund announced last year by Victims Minister Adam Ingram has not yet been allocated. The Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT) agreed to administer the fund on behalf of the Victims Liaison Unit, but after discussion with a number of the groups who might benefit from the fund, the NIVT advised the Victims Liaison Unit that it would not be able to allocate this funding on the terms suggested. The Victims Liaison Unit is currently examining alternative options for distributing the £200,000.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Billy Stevenson at the Victims Liaison Unit.

Touchstone Group Restructured

The Touchstone Group, which was established last year by Victims Minister Adam Ingram, has been restructured to make it more representative of the range of interests within the victim community. The Group was formed to enable a cross-section of those representing victims interests to provide Government with advice and guidance on policy development in this area.

Membership of the group now includes representatives from the following areas:

An Crann/The Tree;
Cost of the Troubles Study;
Cúnamh;
Disabled Police Officers Association;
Families Acting for Innocent Relatives;
Families Against Intimidation and Terror;
Kairos;
Relatives for Justice;
Shankill Stress Centre;
Social Services Inspectorate;
Sperrin Lakeland Healthcare Trust;
Survivors of Trauma;
Victim Support NI;
WAVE;
Victims Liaison Unit.

Your comments

The VLU newsletter will be produced on a regular basis. If you have any comments on this newsletter or on any other issues relating to the implementation of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report, please contact the Unit.