

# Twaddell Ardoyne Shankill Communities in Transition

Finding new ways of working was among the challenges presented to TASCIT project coordinator Rab McCallum.

Challenging people to come out of their comfort zones is what TASCIT is all about.

Usually, while still a challenge, it is gentle and at participants' own pace but the coronavirus pandemic has no respect for that so the team and the local communities had to quickly adapt to a different way of life.

In some ways old barriers were easier to break down because there was a common fight and crisis that needed to be addressed.

The TASCIT peace walls programme is focused on bringing people together, on people getting to know each other, confidence building, and establishing relationships across interfaces.

Covid meant that bringing people on different sides of traditional divides together for discussion, challenging people to come out of their comfort zones and engage with each other had to be done in different ways.

TASCIT's Challenging Conversations group involving physical meetings, residentials, and visits to places like Portadown, South Armagh, and Dublin, was an immediate casualty of Covid-19. People staying at home to protect their own lives and other people's lives meant all the usual ways of working had to be rethought, Rab says.

"We continued to engage people with the programme through Whatsapp," he said.

"We stayed in touch."

Collaboration started to take place, people helped with foodbanks, sewing face coverings and gowns for workers. Linking up with other community groups was a big plus. When one woman's sewing machine broke there was a cross community response to fix that. £500 was raised so she could get back to work.

"Celebrating the work of other was important," Rab said "And the gratitude being displayed was noticeable."

Spirits were raised in the darkest of moments by the developing sense of community in a fight against the same thing.

"There was huge positivity among people", Rab said. "People were facing a common problem."

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“They seemed more willing to accommodate each other. “That made our work easier.”

Difficulties included finding it hard to recruit new people into the group as limitations on people’s movement was the reality of everyday life for a long time.

Inequality in access to technology was another barrier.

“People not tech savvy felt left behind,” Rab said. “Our programme is about getting to know people. Zoom is not the same.”

“You have to take a leap and go into communities.

“It was also hard to recruit new people in at a time like this.”

Getting those “not tech savvy” up to speed with technology was overcome as much as possible and as restrictions ease bringing programmes back is key. There was a human approach among people who usually would not.

“It was glaringly obvious the lengths people were going to, to help other who they wouldn’t see as political allies.

“People took a human approach and found a human level.”

The danger is the chance people “revert back” and goodwill fades.

“I am hopeful that people will see we have been in this together.

“We can explore what that means to us. It is an opportunity to think in new ways.”

If forced to sum up the experience in one word, for Rab it’s “strange” but also a chance for a “new way of working”.

TASCIT has built new relationships and sees the value in those being maintained.

“It’s been a strange experience. We try to take all opportunities to see if we can use them some way. It is important people see there is cooperation and collaboration. We extended the people we reach and found another network of people we hadn’t met before.”