



Northern Ireland Counselling Forum Strategic Report

Summer 2012



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Northern Ireland Counselling Forum

Strategic Summary

The organisation has been operating on an ad hoc basis for 9 years as a support mechanism and focal point for the counselling and therapeutic communities in Northern Ireland.

The organisation has within it several well placed members who sit on various forums and committees with strategic importance to the counselling and therapeutic community in Northern Ireland.

The Forum is now recognised as a focal point for the voice of this community as evidenced at the 'Working Together' Conference. The suggestions made at the conference for future work to be done by the Forum clearly show the direction and shape that the membership wish the Forum to take.

The membership have concerns and issues about the perception and status of their professions and wish to debate and discuss these concerns and issues in a way that could be brought to the attention of the decision makers at government and policy level.

The membership wish to see professional standard services being offered to those who require them and want pathways to attain that professionalism available in Northern Ireland.

The Forum and its membership are keenly aware of the added complexities to clients due to the historical conflict in and around Northern Ireland; the effect that this has on counsellor / client relationships and on the difficulties a client may be facing.



Northern Ireland Counselling Forum

The organisation

The Northern Ireland Counselling Forum came into existence to fulfil the identified need for a representative body for Counsellors, Counselling Educators and all related disciplines in Northern Ireland.

This need developed from the DHSSPS Counselling Review and the forthcoming registration and regulation for the Counselling profession in Northern Ireland.

The Forum held its first meeting in February 2003.

The membership is open to counsellors, trainees, related disciplines and non-counsellors who are genuinely interested in promoting or furthering the aims of NICF and are willing to adhere to the rules of the NICF.

In 2012, the NICF has 300 members.

Northern Ireland has the highest prescribing levels in the UK, in particular for anti-depressants (and the second highest prescribers of anti-depressants in Europe), increasing demands on mental health services and a high suicide rate. Additionally, although many of the difficulties experienced by people living in Northern Ireland are similar to those found in other areas, an added dimension is the enduring legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.¹

The Practice Framework for services being provided to Victims and Survivors in Northern Ireland set out the minimum standards required (by April 2014) by all services offered to the sector and were researched and agreed by the Standards Working Group by December 2011.² The optimum standards are to be examined by a new advisory group for the Victims and Survivors service alongside the monitoring and evaluation requirement of the existing standards.

“Historically, investment in community mental health services in Northern Ireland has not kept pace with the rest of the UK, in spite of the fact that we have greater problems with mental health. It is estimated that one in four people will suffer from a medically identified mental illness during his or her lifetime. Mental ill health costs an estimated 3% to 4% of our gross domestic product, mainly through loss of productivity but also through the cost of healthcare and social security benefits. In 2010-11 in Northern Ireland, we spent £228 million on mental health services. That represents around 8% of the total budget spend on health and social care.”³

¹ West Belfast Primary Care Partnership 'Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Services in the West Belfast PCP Area – Service Mapping, Understanding the current position and planning a path for change' September 2011

² Standards Working Group Final Report February 2012

³ Michael Stewart Copeland's speech delivered to Stormont 17th April 2012



NICF Aims and Objectives

The organisation has been working to the aims and objectives stated below.

- To be a common voice for the counselling communities in Northern Ireland
- To raise public awareness of counselling in Northern Ireland
- To promote and develop professional standards and research relating to counselling
- To raise awareness of professional counselling accreditation in Northern Ireland
- To be an influence in policy making at all levels concerning counselling
- To provide CPD for practicing and student counsellors in Northern Ireland
- To work alongside government bodies to raise the profile of professional counselling in Northern Ireland
- To network with other professionals and to have a presence at conferences and events relating to counselling in Northern Ireland

Strategic report process for 2012

In Spring 2012, The NICF embarked on an in-depth process of reviewing its organisation, aims and objectives, in order to produce a new Strategic Report in 2012 linked with the conference 'Working Together' which was held on Saturday 28th April 2012 at the Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim.

The process involved a NICF paper review, focus groups, meetings with clients, members and the Management Committee and the 'Working Together' Conference.

The purpose was to explore the organisation at this point in time and determine the key strategic questions facing it now and in the future.

Questions about, for and between the Counselling sector were generated at the conference and by a sub group of the NICF Forum.

This document represents the outcome of that process: Northern Ireland Counselling Forum Strategic report 2012.

The follow up should be further in depth discussion and debate on the strategic questions by the Forum membership in order to reach an agreement on the strategic plan for the next three years. To agree the way forward for the organisation so that it can meet its aims and objectives.



Vision Statement

The Northern Ireland Counselling Forum aspires to a Northern Ireland community and society whose health, mental health and wellbeing is thriving through access to professional high quality mental health care.

Mission Statement

The NICF seeks to promote quality standards within the counselling and therapeutic communities. The NICF seeks to effectively represent the practical needs of the Counselling profession in Northern Ireland through lobbying, networking and being represented in statutory and professional bodies.

Values

The NICF firmly believes that:

- Counselling has a large part to play in the provision of high quality professional mental health care provision in Northern Ireland.
- Individuals are entitled to support structures which work with them in their mental health provision.
- Counselling should be undertaken by those who are professionally qualified / accredited or under professional supervision whilst training for their professional qualification.
- Counsellors need to engage in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to acquire additional knowledge, skills and techniques.
- Counsellors should have the opportunity to consult and exchange views with other experienced and trusted practitioners.
- Counsellors need to work within a professional standards framework to ensure that counselling provision is both competent and ethical.
- Whilst counselling in any jurisdiction has to deal with many of the challenges of modern life, that the Northern Ireland context adds levels of complexity (through learnt behaviours, attitudes and repressed emotions occasioned by the conflict in and around Northern Ireland) to these challenges.



The 'Working Together' Conference

The NICF 'Working Together' conference was held on Saturday 28th April 2012 in the Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim.

123 participants were welcomed by Paul Davis and the conference was officially opened by the Northern Ireland Counselling Forum Patron Baroness May Blood, with Victims Commissioner Bertha McDougall setting the context for the conference were she stressed the importance of professional counselling services in Northern Ireland today.

Robin Shohet, counsellor supervisor and author of books including 'Supervision in the Helping Profession', 'Passionate Supervision' and 'Supervision as Transformation' was the key note speaker and introduced the themes of caring and love in the counsellor / client and supervisor / counsellor relationships as fundamental to best practice. The audience was spellbound in this interactive session.

During lunch participants were asked to think of questions for the plenary panel event in the afternoon and for key questions for the sector.

After lunch participants had a choice of 5 workshops to attend. All were well attended, thoroughly enjoyed and felt worthwhile.

1. Robin Shohet's workshop 'Do I dare tell you who I am?' explored risk, vulnerability and intimacy in the supervisory relationship.
2. Whilst the complexities, challenges and benefits of working in a multidisciplinary team were explored in Bobby Moore's workshop
3. Cathy Bell's workshop 'Through the Looking Glass, What do you see?' explored the current emotional health and wellbeing initiatives currently in our schools and the challenges of working across different disciplines.
4. The Zest for Life workshop 'Moving Together towards Healing' was taken by Hazel Marsden and Lena Bambrick, and gave an overview of the work and models used with victims of clerical abuse across our communities.
5. Using art and small group work Kate Canavan's workshop explored what aids and what works against supervisors and counsellors working together.



After the workshops participants gathered for a plenary panel session. The panel consisted of Bobbie More, Robin Shohet and Cathy Bell – workshop facilitators, alongside Michael Copeland MLA, Bertha McDougall Victims Commissioner, Phyllis Coulter Lead advisor to Northern Ireland from the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Rhonda Elder Northern Ireland Counselling Forum and Diarmuid Hughes a service user.

Questions focused on relationships across disciplines, on professionalizing the work through standardisation and registration and ways forward after this conference. The Questions can be seen in Appendix 1.

Not all questions were asked to the plenary panel due to time constraints.

Brenda Tighe Chair of the Northern Ireland Counselling Forum thanked everyone for attending. Of the 123 participants at the conference only 43 were existing NICF members.

Evaluation forms were given to all 123 participants and 45 were completed and returned. The findings are in Appendix 2.



Strategic Areas 2012

1 Core Business

The NICF seeks to promote quality standards within the counselling and therapeutic communities. The NICF seeks to effectively represent the practical needs of the Counselling profession in Northern Ireland through lobbying, networking and being represented in statutory and professional bodies.

2 Organisational Development

To continually develop the Northern Ireland Counselling Forum positively as a best practice organisation.

3 Information and Influence

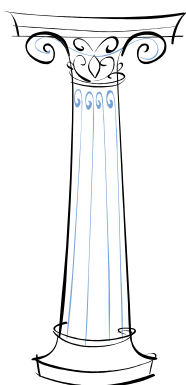
To undertake work which utilises and honours the information / data we have gathered and continue to gather, in the most appropriate way, through: Conferences, workshops, publications, Research, Lobbying, Awareness-raising and representation on appropriate boards, committees or discussion groups.

4 Outreach and Relationships

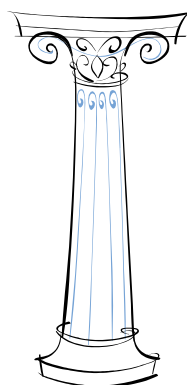
To reach people beyond the immediate community already involved with the Northern Ireland Counselling Forum.

5 Profile and Publicity

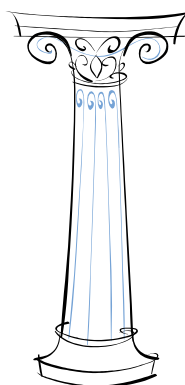
To raise the public profile of The Northern Ireland Counselling Forum, both its role and the needs of its client group and membership, so that they receive greater recognition, validation and support.



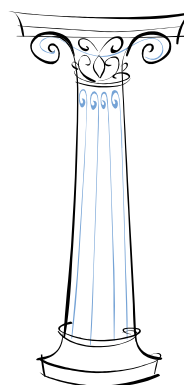
Profile &
Publicity



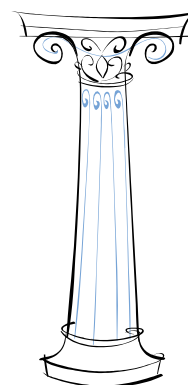
Organisational
Development



**Core
Business**



Information
& Influence



Outreach &
Relationships



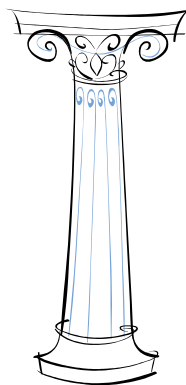
Strategic Area 1 – Core Business

The NICF seeks to promote quality standards within the counselling and therapeutic communities. The NICF seeks to effectively represent the practical needs of the Counselling profession in Northern Ireland through lobbying, networking and being represented in statutory and professional bodies.

Objective 1: To identify and agree a framework of the accepted quality standards within the counselling and therapeutic communities in Northern Ireland through discussions with those communities, Health Boards and Trusts, Education, Community organisations and the Government.

Objective 2: To promote the agreed framework of standards within the counselling and therapeutic communities and with, Health Boards and Trusts, Education, Community organisations and the Government.

Objective 3: To be a recognised voice for the counselling and therapeutic communities in Northern Ireland with Health Boards and Trusts, Education, Community organisations and the Government; through involvement with statutory and professional bodies and proactive lobbying and advocacy with all interested parties.



Strategic Area 2 – Organisational Development

To continually develop the Northern Ireland Counselling Forum positively as a best practice organisation.

Objective 1: To agree a strategic direction for the organisation over the next three years.

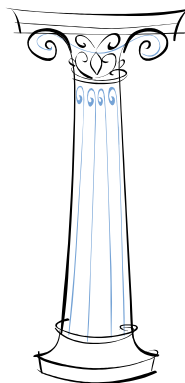
Objective 2: To develop a one year operational plan to fulfil the agreed strategic direction, which is to be reviewed, amended and built on for year two.

Objective 3: To finalise the constitution of the organisation and disseminate this information to as many interested parties as possible.

Objective 4: To obtain charitable status for the organisation.

Objective 5: To ensure all committee members are aware of their responsibilities and role within the organisation, and to have deputy's for each of the office bearers or specific functional roles.

Objective 6: To maintain strong governance and best practice procedures in all the organisation's dealings.



Strategic Area 3 – Information and Influence

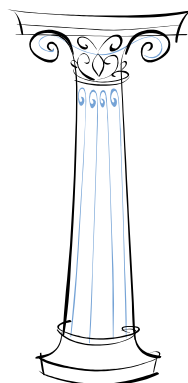
To undertake work which utilises and honours the information / data we have gathered and continue to gather, in the most appropriate way, through: Conferences, workshops, publications, Research, Lobbying, Awareness-raising and representation on appropriate boards, committees or discussion groups.

Objective 1: To encourage debate and discussion on the various issues facing the counselling and therapeutic communities in Northern Ireland. The findings of these discussions to be recorded and disseminated in the most appropriate method.

Objective 2: To encourage and promote the production of research and publications relevant to the counselling and therapeutic communities in Northern Ireland.

Objective 3: To awareness raise the role of the counselling and therapeutic communities in Northern Ireland to the wider Northern Ireland society.

Objective 4: To have representation on appropriate boards, committees and discussion groups.



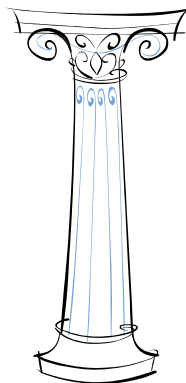
Strategic Area 4 – Outreach and Relationships

To reach people beyond the immediate community already involved with the Northern Ireland Counselling Forum.

Objective 1: To identify linked organisations within the sphere of counselling and therapy, seeking to build relationships with them for mutual benefit. I.e. the AA or NA.

Objective 2: To identify various media providers and build working relationships with them to raise the level of profile for NICF in the public eye.

Objective 3: To allow individuals the opportunity to contact the NICF directly.



Strategic Area 5 - Profile and Publicity

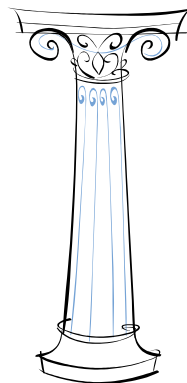
To raise the public profile of The Northern Ireland Counselling Forum, both its role and the needs of its client group and membership, so that they receive greater recognition, validation and support.

Objective 1: To target market NICF to the different sectors relevant to the field of mental and emotional care and wellbeing, by producing distinct and discrete publications aimed at, for example, Health Boards and Trusts, Education, Community organisations and the Government.

Objective 2: To agree the appropriate level of profile for NICF in the public eye, and with funders and other providers.

Objective 3: To undertake a public relations campaign aimed at attaining that profile which could include:

- Hosting events to disseminate good practice
- Working collaboratively with other groups and seeking publicity for it
- Attending events to publicise and network on behalf of NICF
- Utilising the website more effectively for Public Relations
- Participating in partnerships and networks
- Using broadcast and print media to promote services and conferences as appropriate.



Appendix 1: Key questions for the Counselling Sector from the 'Working Together' Conference.

Core Business

Standards

- How important do you think it is for counsellors to be regulated and members of the Health Professional Council?
- How do we move towards standardisation and registration?

Supervision

- Why is funding being cut within community agencies for clinical supervision; as BACP requirements/ recommendation is 1.5 hours per month minimum, now only getting 1.25 hours per month and also doing supervision in own time. Why should employed counsellors need to pick up this expense?
- Funding for supervision, where should it come from?

Remuneration

- Should there be professional rates?
- Is the Forum aware of counselling work contracted to a company / agency that pays very little for the work i.e.; £20 per hour?

Funding

- Streamline funding?
- Can NICF explore funding issues and the impact of the benefits system on the victim / sick role?
- Whilst there have been great benefits from counselling funding recently it has all been short term crisis intervention. What are the views on time limited or long term counselling?

Suggested workshop / training topics

- Exploration of the various interventions and preventions in place in Northern Ireland regarding suicide.
- How therapy can help develop mindfulness, self esteem and self awareness in a client.



Organisational Development

- Should NICF set up autonomously – the benefits versus the drawbacks?
- How do we move on from the ‘working together’ conference, a committed action from today?

Information & Influence

- GP’s recognise the strength of counselling, however, most do so without any accountability both professionally and financially. How can NICF ensure that a system is in place that this accountability can be qualitative with standards that are based within a framework of client care and practice?
- The issue of counsellors undervaluing their work has been mentioned, what practical ways can counsellors influence policy?
- The majority of counsellors are employed by the community and voluntary sector. How will the NICF ensure that department monies reach this sector for such a service?
- Compton is about change and adapting present services to that change. As counselling has for too long been unrepresented within the present healthcare system can NICF ensure that we become part of the developing change? Or what role could it play?

Profile & Publicity

- Counselling is a professional and essential service. How do we ensure that the rest of the professions see us as being professional and essential?
- Why don’t we appreciate the great work we do?

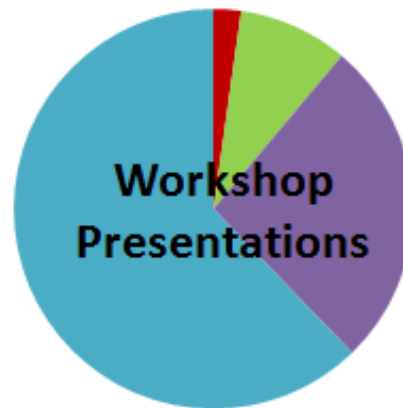
Outreach & relationships

- In many countries therapists have very positive relationships with 12 step fellowships such as AA & NA. How can NICF help build relationships with these and similar organisations?
- How can we ensure that the primary care teams employ counsellors similarly to other health professionals, i.e. psychology, OT’S etc ... if it is to be referral based can we insist that we are part of that multi-disciplinary team process?



Appendix 2: Evaluation Summary of the 'Working Together' Conference
 45 completed evaluation forms from 123 participants (a 37% return)

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
 Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Good Very Good Excellent



Key point

Participants would have liked the day to be more focused on local issues with more time to discuss and debate the concerns of the counselling sector in Northern Ireland.

Positive Commentary

- *“Excellent day, thank you. (Hope momentum isn’t lost as per the post 2004 Dunadry intentions!)”*
- *“I think the impact of the work put together in the forum is a testament to how well it is run and how energised we are from this. Hope that this is the beginning of something that will grow and present the voice of our profession.”*
- *“Thoroughly enjoyed”*
- *“Excellent day where each of the workshops sounded well worth going to, I was spoiled for choice”*
- *“Felt that it was really great to get an opportunity to network and talk to others”*
- *“Congratulations on a great conference can’t have enough of Robin Shoet. Thanks”*
- *“Well done to the organisers. This was an excellent conference. More please.”*
- *“Great day, great opportunity for concerns to be voiced, friends re-met and new friends made!”*
- *“Thank you so much, really well done”*
- *“Wonderful day, thanks to all involved”*
- *“Thank you so much to Brenda and all the team”*
- *“Panel questions were informative”*
- *“Good opportunity to network”*
- *“Excellent generally”*
- *“Overall excellent”*

Commentary to learn from

- *“Plenary questions went on too long”*
- *“Belfast would have been more accessible”*
- *“Felt that too much time given to one particular speaker on the panel – rest of conference excellent”*
- *“Would have liked to have heard more from therapists on the panel”*
- *“I would have liked a bit more discussion / exploration as to ‘how supervisors & supervisees can work together – what aids it and what can work against it’”*



Learning

- Ask people to be respectful of others during these events
- Time limit questions to panel
- Don't allow political speeches
- Time limit the panel
- Don't allow individuals to hog the panel
- More discussion and exploration of the main topic
- Consider different locations

Suggestions

- *“Can it become an annual fixture? What about a North / South event to learn from each others practice?”*
- *“More local input into which direction ‘we’ want to take”*
- *“Work forward on more practical issues to help create a more united voice”*
- *“More conferences”*
- *“Develop a strategy for the Counselling Forum. Work plans for a future working together. Continue to be supportive. Look forward to the next conference”*
- *“Need to take our role in society seriously and to demand far better pay rewards; need for collective and strategic approach to resist funding cuts to community and voluntary agencies providing counselling; to produce and make available records (video / DVD) of the conference to members of NICF”*

