



Charity No. NIC101142

Decorum NI

Remembering the Past – Building the Future

Chair's Report 2022-2023

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our AGM, and I want to thank you for taking the time to come along tonight.

It is my duty as Chair of Decorum NI to report to you on the correct management and success, or otherwise, of the group for the year ending 31 March 2023.

The purpose of Decorum NI is to provide support to those who served, and their families, during the period of Operation Banner, in Northern Ireland. Our motto is 'Remembering the Past, Building the Future; but I like to think that we are also about supporting each other to live as positively as we can in the present. Decorum now has 870 members.

From Friday 1st April 2022 we began to gradually return to normal. Personal Development Groups had allocated times, days, and spaces to accommodate everyone wanting to use the facilities. I am glad to be able to report that Decorum has continued to fulfil its purpose and worked hard to provide an excellent service to all our members.

FACILITIES

Over the year we have gradually adjusted to the easing of restrictions with a return to 'in person' events.

There are positives to take from the whole experience of lockdown, whilst a difficult and troubling time, many of us discovered reserves of strength and resilience we hadn't appreciated we possessed; and more accurate identification of attendees and a review of the services we provided have enabled us to continue to respond to members requests.

In August the committee carried out a Moving Forward Survey, met with Group Leaders to assess how the current rota was working out, and a new regime was implemented from 5th September 2022.

We also formalised our Code of Conduct, sending a copy to existing members and one to every new member going forward.

Your committee also seek to learn and expand their knowledge in order to provide a safe and holistic environment for all. Training was undertaken in:-

A Brief by Ulster Human Rights Watch

Keeping Adults Safe

Mental Health & Suicide Awareness

Basic First Aid

H&WBCW

Our Health and Wellbeing case worker continues to follow the Take 5 Model.

This model sets out the way to help and encourage others to help themselves. Decorum NI adopted this model in its planning and budgeting. The 5 Steps in the model are:

Connect

We encourage our members to 'Connect' with each other and with others, particularly, by providing a warm welcome at our Drop-In facility where people, can come in, relax, feel secure, seek help and find camaraderie.

Keep Learning

Decorum NI has aided our members in their learning. With writing courses, genealogy courses, augmented by crochet classes, craft work, photography classes, IT tuition, and other development classes, we ensure our members have been able to learn, develop, create, and very importantly, enjoy stretching themselves in their knowledge and learning of new skills.

Be Active

Decorum NI does provide many different ways for our members to 'be active'. Whether it's coming to the many weekly or monthly groups, including activities such as fishing, photography, flower arranging, and many others, all to keep and improve our member's activity.

Take Notice

It's important to be aware of what's going on around you with family, community, and the wider contexts of politics, government and change. Decorum NI have sought out speakers to talk to groups of members on wide-ranging subjects so that members are well-informed and can take notice of what is going on.

Give

Our members are encouraged to 'Give' of their time, perhaps money and certainly giving of themselves which is important in being a valued and valuable member of society. Having come from professions that were about helping others, our members naturally are selfless givers of their time, of their skills and of themselves, to help others both inside and outside our organisation.

During the past year we have successfully applied for additional funding for one-off projects to enhance social connections and these have proven to be most enjoyable for all who have participated.

FUTURE STRATEGY

Our on-going strategy as a group has four aims:

To make and promote Decorum NI as a first-class provider of support and services.

To ensure services and support provided by Decorum NI are meeting the needs of our members.

To ensure there is sufficient funding for Decorum NI to provide the support and services needed by our members now and for the future.

To educate others in the mission of Decorum NI and ensure the legacy of sacrifice is acknowledged and remembered.

This strategy has continued to guide the Committee in deciding on how to prioritise the use of resources to meet member's needs in the best way. In addition to surveying our members about their needs, we also obtain feedback from them on the support and events provided. This is then used to make sure we are not only doing the right things for members but also doing them right. I am glad to report that 99% of the time, such feedback has been positive throughout the year. Negative feedback is viewed as an opportunity to learn and improve future service.

We have always been conscious of the growing agenda of some sections of society to re-write the history of our pasts. Decorum continues to engage with different groups, media outlets, and to participate in research and so on, to ensure that our stories, our perspective is not omitted in these articles and that we do not become a footnote in history.

FUNDING

As I think most people are by now aware, funding across all sectors of voluntary service has come under increasing pressure with budgets having been ruthlessly cut back. Decorum NI has been fortunate in that the Victims and Survivors Service remains our core funders and a new application will be submitted at the end of 2023 to take us forward for another 5 years – if successful. This funding is for the running of the drop in centre, a small work programme and the SSO salary.

Peace IV finished in November and is being replaced in January 2024 by Peace Plus. The interim period is being covered by Gap Funding from local government at Stormont. This funding is to cover the Health & Wellbeing Caseworker.

We are, however, fortunate to be seen as a 'trusted provider' of services and this puts us in a strong position when we apply for funding.

We are very grateful to the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) for all their support. During the year we have also applied for other 'one-off' grants.

All the money we receive through grants is earmarked for specific, named projects. This does not finance all our services and so any additional fund-raising by our members is very welcome for the 'extras', although we are not and do not want to become a fundraising group.

I know that money is tight for everyone, but I want to specifically appeal to each one to consider giving on a one-off or on a monthly basis through our 'Invest My Community' page if and when you can.

We are especially grateful to those members who have personally donated funds. Thank you to all those who have given and, in anticipation, those who will give after this appeal.

STAFF

Decorum NI have only two salaried full-time staff. They are our Senior Staff Officer and Health and Well-being Caseworker.

The role of the Senior Staff Officer is to plan and manage the Drop-In Centre and all ongoing projects as well as directing and supporting volunteers and he is directed and supported in his role by the Committee. Whilst Mitch is very good at what he does, keeping all the plates spinning, and as well as the plaudits for a job well-done, his can be a frustrating and thankless job. It is he who must ensure that while the rest of us swan about enjoying ourselves, he ensures we comply with all the regulations, the record keeping and the guidelines. The Committee acknowledge the dedication and work of the SSO in making Decorum NI successful.

And, of course, alongside the SSO is Linda.

The role of the Health and Well-being Caseworker is to support members and others referred to her by VSS in assessing their needs and sourcing the needed help. The committee were delighted when her work was again held up as an example of excellence to others earlier this year. She also sources appropriate courses for members such as Equine Therapy and Carers Respite Breaks.

The Committee thank both members of staff for their individual work but also their ability to work together to make such a success of what we do.

VOLUNTEERS

Members of Decorum NI who want to help others are encouraged to become Volunteers within the group. The committee recognises that these volunteers are the backbone of the organisation. They include those in formal roles such as the Committee, the official volunteers who sign up for specific roles – housekeeping, DIY, IT support. As well as the volunteers with expertise who run the many specific interest groups, right through to the less formal roles of members who volunteer as requested, helping to set up, or clear up after, events. These volunteers are managed and supported by our Senior Staff Officer, and were rewarded during Volunteer Week on 14th June 2022 at La Mon.

The Committee thanks all these volunteers and acknowledge we would not be so successful if it was not for their efforts.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Our volunteers have used their interests, expertise and knowledge to form activity groups for other members to enjoy and gain new skills and interests. The groups meet weekly, bi-weekly or monthly and are all supported by good attendance of members. The groups vary in size but all are successful in what they do.

Groups currently running for members are:

Crochet & Knitting Group
Crafts Group
DIY
Felting Group
Genealogy Group
Flower Arranging Group
Horticulture Group
Fishing Group
Creative Minds & Voices Group / Creative Writing
Photography Group

The choir has not, so far, started again permanently, but who could forget the excellent programme they put on at Christmas?

Just recently a new monthly Friendship & Support Group has been established.

Then we have provided Drop-in for coffee and a chat, lunches with a huge variety of cuisine; and even soup and a roll, on occasions. We provided Christmas Dinner and made up Hampers for distribution to members.

I also want to give you a quick overview of the one-off events of the last year.

In 2022 we went to Islandbridge, in Dublin to lay a wreath for the IRBL for their Remembrance Day Service and the following day we were guests of the Taoiseach's office to Ireland's National Day of Remembrance. Both were very moving events. This was the first time these had been held since the start of the pandemic.

We held a Remembrance Day Service and Breakfast on our premises as well as having representation at some of the local Cenotaphs.

And as we do every year, we participated in Holocaust Memorial Week.

There was a Mystery Bus Trip, a jaunt to Fermanagh, an overnight stay in Dumfries, a visit to the RUCGC Garden at Knock and a Cultural Trip to Carrickfergus.

We had a Film, Wine and Cheese night, attended a Pantomime, relived all our yesterdays with Clubsound in Concert. We had Sing-a-Longs and Storytelling.

There was the Allotment Open Day, a BBQ, Fishing Competition, Platinum Jubilee Lunch. Some of us attended the Blue Grass Music Festival in Omagh and the Bord Bia Bloom 2022 (largest gardening festival in Ireland).

We had a Christmas Show (with lots of talent among our members) and a Christmas Coffee morning. We donned our tartan for Burns Night.

We made apple tarts and showed our knowledge (or lack of it) at the Mayor's Table Quiz.

Then there are the courses. We have hosted a Ukelele Course, a Painting Course, Beginners Calligraphy, Canoe Course, Creative Writing and ran a Citizenship Course with Millisle Youth Forum.

We facilitated some of our members to participate in an Equine Therapy Course.

An impressive list when heard like this.

Members have also attended other, external events on Decorum's behalf; European Victims Day; UK Veterans Family Study and so on.

SPECIALIST SUPPORT

Specialist support and advice to members who have specific needs is provided by SEFF in relation to benefits and the Troubles Pension. They also provide an Advocacy Worker in relation to Legacy issues. Both have been very successful.

THANK YOU

Now, I must take time to give a big Thank You to all those who have been instrumental in the success of Decorum NI.

Externally, I must thank our Mayor, VSS and Peace IV, Ards and North Down Borough Council, SEFF and others who have supported us so well.

Internally, I thank the lynchpin of our group, our Senior Staff Officer, who with his dedication, commitment and enthusiasm kept us on track. I also thank our Health and Well-being Caseworker for the excellent support to members in all its forms.

On behalf of members, I would also like to thank our President, the Senior Management Team and the members of the Committee for giving of their time, energy and commitment to keeping the ship afloat and heading in the right direction.

I thank our Treasurer and Secretary for their work in maintaining our accounts and maintaining our processes.

I offer a big Thank You to all our Volunteers who give selflessly of themselves so that services and events run so smoothly and efficiently. As we know volunteers are paid nothing but are priceless.

Lastly, but certainly not least, thank you to our members who participate in what we do and who make things worthwhile.

FUTURE

For the future, we wait to find out about our funding from VSS and Peace Plus, but our own Group Funds are reasonably healthy. We look forward to things continuing in our new normal and our many and diverse groups being able to continue in strength.

I believe that through Decorum NI, we have touched peoples' lives for the better and pray that we all have the health and strength to continue for many years to come.

Fiona (Gray) Craig

Chair

Decorum NI