



Omagh Support & Self- Help Group

ANNUAL REPORT

2005 – 2006



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Background

Beginnings:

Omagh Support & Self Help Group (OSSHG) was founded in the aftermath of the Omagh Bomb in 1998 to act as a source of support and solace for those adversely affected by the Bomb.

The Self Help & Support Group is a victims group, made up of victims from all denominations and walks of life. Whilst the group primarily operates within the area of Omagh District, it retains close alliances with victims of the bomb located in Buncrana and Spain, as well as a wider network of victims throughout Ireland

Mission Statement:

“Our mission is to promote, advocate, and address where possible, the needs of victims of the conflict in Ireland in order to achieve health, peace of mind, security and the foundations for personal growth. We are committed to addressing the real and practical needs of those bereaved and injured as a result of terrorist activity, and ensuring that victims are afforded the respect and consideration they deserve”.

Objectives:

- Relief of poverty, sickness, disability of victims
- Advancement of education and protection
- Raising awareness of needs and experiences of victims, and the effects of terrorism
- Welfare rights advice and information
- Improving conditions of life for victims

The above objectives are reflected in the work of Omagh Support and Self Help Group through our core activities:

- Advice, Advocacy and support
- Assistance with form filling
- I.T. Training courses
- Team Building Events
- Complimentary Therapies
- Monthly Social Activities
- Archive of historical material
- Lobbying
- Youth Work
- Carers Advice and Information

Omagh Support and Self Help Group Annual General Meeting

**Tuesday 5th September 2006, at 7.30pm, The Silverbirch Hotel,
Omagh**

- 1.0 Welcome by the Chair
- 2.0 Apologies
- 3.0 Chairman's Report
- 4.0 Project Co-ordinator's Report
- 5.0 Accountant and Treasurer's presentation and adoption of accounts
- 6.0 Appointment of Accountant
- 7.0 Election of Honorary Officers and Committee Members

Chairman's Report

Dear members and friends,

It has been 15 months since our last AGM on the 4th of June 2005 that was held in the Village Inn Killyclogher. Much has happened since. I will outline a number of the important events that have happened over that period.

Shortly after the AGM we were horrified by the 7th July London bombings.

In August Lord Rooker wrote giving us permission to use the land adjacent to the memorial garden so as we can have it enlarged.

In October we meet with the Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Dermot Ahern in Dundalk

In November I attended a Victims Conference in San Sebastian Spain

On the 29th November we had one of the most important meetings with the Prime Minister Tony Blair with which we raised the issue of a public inquiry.

In early January our Web Site went live and has proven to be a very useful tool to get our message out to the wider community we are proud of the work carried out by Castle Web Design and all the people that worked on it part time and full time.

We meet in January with Sir Reg Empey and later with the Garda Commissioner Noel Conroy. At the end of January we meet with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commissioner's including Monica Mc Williams.

In February we meet with ACC Sam Kincaid and ACC Peter Sheridan along with the Omagh Investigation team Mr Kincaid told the families that he believed Det. Sgnt John White's account of events before and after the Omagh bomb he also told us that MI5 had knowledge of a potential attack on Omagh three months before the Omagh bomb but they did not pass this on to the R.U.C this was devastating new to all of us

In early March the film Omagh opened the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival in Toronto Canada, which I attended and was a great success

In April we had a two and a half hour meeting with the Chief Constable in police headquarters the following day Paddy Dixon was arrested in England

On the 6th April Sean Hoey's preliminary hearing started in Belfast and a number of the group members attended it and at the end of April we travelled to Dublin and gave a presentation to the Irish Human Rights Commission in support of our call for a public inquiry

On the 4th of May we withdrew our support from the council memorial working group. We then arranged to have the appropriate wording put on the stone in the memorial garden and had the land given to us by Lord Rooker fenced off.

On the 11th of May we met with the U S Consul General in Belfast to draw this attention to the dissident web site and to update him on the group's activities

At the beginning of July Sgnt John White's trial started lasting four weeks and ended on the 28th July finding him not guilty

At the beginning of August Donna Mc McCauley joined us as a new member of staff with the responsibility for developing the website and on line archive her work will also include developing and strengthening links with the Buncrana families

On the 13th August we held the eighth annual memorial service both the British and Irish Governments sent senior Ministers the general public supported us in increasing numbers This was the last official function that our coordinator Sharon Watters took part in and we were saddened to see her leave as she was very professional and efficient with a pleasant manner we wish her well in her new career and hope to appoint Sharon's successor shortly We are grateful to Fiona for the additional hours and work which she has been helping us with until Sharon's post is filled.

On the 24th August we met with Mark Durkin to discuss the memorial garden marking of the bomb site and a public inquiry.

On 31st August we met with the senior prosecutor in the Hoey trial

The above events and meetings are only a part of the group's activities over the past 15 months

The coming year will bring many challenges to all of us particularly the Hoey trial which starts tomorrow

Looking back we as a committee along with our delicate staff have achieved much including training recreational courses therapy's benefit advice which adds up to thousands of pounds for the benefit of our members

It is important that we continue to support each other through our mutual cooperation I have no doubt that we can continue to achieve much in the year ahead

I thank all of you for your continued support and encouragement

Michael Gallagher
Chairman

Project Co-ordinator's Report

Omagh Support and Self Help Group has grown and pro-actively developed in many aspects over the past year. Increases in membership, development of sub – groups and the vast amount of activities that have been successfully completed over the past year are testimony to the important and vital role that the Support and Self Help Group plays in the Community.

The key successes of the Support Group over the past year are summarised as follows:

Recreational and Educational Courses

As a result of the success of 2004's extensive programme of recreational and educational courses a whole host of interesting courses have taken place over the past year.

Members both male and female, young and old have enjoyed flower arranging, first aid, card making, Spanish, digital photography, calligraphy and drug awareness training.

The recreational and creative nature of the courses which OSSHG provides are instrumental in aiding the personal development of Group members. Through participation members are afforded the opportunity to liaise with each other and learn at their own pace in a comfortable environment.



Monthly Social Activities

One of the most successful components of Omagh Support and Self Help Group has been the establishment of monthly social activities for all members. The premise of the monthly get togethers is to provide members with an opportunity to catch up, to share what is happening within the group, and to provide new ideas for group direction.

During the past year members have enjoyed a wide range of social get together's ranging from day trips to historical buildings such as Glenveagh Castle and Springhill Country house to informative guest speaker evenings on topics such as taking care of yourself in the winter months, tales of Old Omagh and stress busting techniques. Members also enjoyed a Christmas shopping trip to Belfast followed by the renowned annual Peace concert at the Waterfront Hall.



Complimentary Therapies

As a result of the popularity and success of complimentary/alternative treatments in providing members with some much needed reduction in stress levels and physical ailments the Support Group has successfully gained further funding support for complimentary treatments during the past 12 months.

Due to demand three fully qualified therapists offer a range of alternative treatments ranging from swedish massage, hot stone therapy, reflexology and auricular candle therapy.

In addition our resident reiki therapist Ms Connie Morrow continues to offer her services every Thursday in OSSHG office. Connie is always booked up well in advance which highlights the beneficial treatment she provides to members.

Staff Development and Training

During the past year Omagh Support and Self Help Group have been very lucky in securing a highly efficient and dedicated Admin Assistant, Fionna Henry, an excellent Archive placement student, Michael Brown and most recently the welcome addition of a highly keen Project Worker Donna McCauley. The skills, experience and dedication of each will ensure OSSHG continues to develop successfully in the forthcoming year.



Omagh Support and Self Help Group actively promote continuing staff development. During the past year I as Co-ordinator of OSSHG have successfully completed NICVA training programmes Human Resource Management and Finance for non Finance Managers. In addition I was also afforded the opportunity to complete the OCN Trauma and Addiction training course in conjunction with Sperrin Lakeland Trust.

Our Admin Assistant Fionna Henry has also successfully completed Inland Revenue PAYE training.

Building Relations

At the core aim of Omagh Support and Self Help Group is the desire to build positive relations and contribute to the creation of a peaceful, stable society for all. This is reflected in the earnest community relations work which OSSHG has undertaken during the past year. Collaborative working practices are clearly evident in the joint funding application between OSSHG, The Koram Centre, Relatives for Justice, UDR Association and United Services Club. This innovative project comprises a range of joint working initiatives from looking at our historical pasts, healing and relaxation residentials as well as a whole host of developmental work such as I.T. and healthy eating programmes.

OSSHG has also been pro-actively advocating and promoting the importance and need for a dedicated Carers' support service. As a result of collaborative working alongside the Belfast Carers' Centre OSSHG has developed a detailed proposal for an outreach support service for Carers' of those affected by the 'troubles'. This service will operate in accordance with GP referrals and will be jointly managed by OSSHG and Belfast Carers' Centre.

The Support Group's relationship with the Claudy Bombing Victims has also been strengthened over the past year with the result of a joint collaborative residential taking place later this year.

OSSHG continues to develop links with other Victim/Survivor Groups throughout the globe, in Canada, Spain, Australia to name but a few.

Group Meetings

During the past year OSSHG has been highly pro-active in relation to the pursuit of justice and campaigning for the human rights of Victims/Survivors of terrorism. This is reflected in the vast number of influential meetings that have taken place in the short course of a year.

In October 2005 representatives from OSSHG met with Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Dermott Ahern. Later in November 2005 a delegation from OSSHG travelled to Downing Street to meet with the Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Since January of this year successful meetings have been held with the Chief Constable of the PSNI, the Gardai Commissioner, both Northern Irish and Irish Human Rights Commissions, the U.S Consulate General, the UUP Leader Sir Reg Empey, Head of the Victims Unit, John Clarke and the newly appointed Interim Victims Commissioner.

Behind each of these meetings members exert a lot of hard work and preparation, a trait which will hopefully continue well into this year and beyond.



Archive and Web site Project

January of this year seen the OSSHG on-line archive and web site come to fruition with 3,500 newspaper articles, accompanying photographs, and video clips.

The primary objective of the project was to create an easily accessible online library of material comprising of newspaper articles, television reports, letters, e-mails, and other media forms relating to the Omagh Bomb and other global terrorist related atrocities. This project was extremely important in terms of the beneficial training and skills which members and volunteers acquired. It is also an innovative project in that although many paper forms of documentation existed in relation to the Bomb there is was no such central on-line source. Therefore this project has been vitally important in terms of reaching out and being accessible to people all over the globe.

The website provides a facility whereby latest news can be viewed, pictures of OSSHG events and projects viewed, on-line comments can be received and donations towards the charitable activities of the Group can be secured.

In November 2005 the Archive Sub Group travelled to the BBC Archive at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra. The study trip provided the Sub Group with the necessary knowledge to set to work on developing the audio section of the on-line archive.



OSSHG staff and Archive Chairman Mark Breslin took part in a one day intensive training session on web site maintenance and as a result can now update and refresh the web site unaided.

In May 2006 Jonathan Crozier completed his placement year with OSSHG and I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to Jonathan for his hard work and dedication. Fortunately the Support Group was successful in securing another placement student through Rutledge Recruitment and Training, Michael Brown. Michael has proven to be a vital asset to the archive project and I would like to also thank him graciously for his time and commitment to the project.

Memorial Services

On the 14th August last year the Support and Self Help Group hosted their second annual service of remembrance in the memorial garden. The dignified service of music, reflection and prayer was well attended by group members and the wider community alike and provided a source of comfort to families during a difficult time.

Sunday 13th August 2006 saw the eighth annual service take place with many people from near and far turning out to share in our remembrance on the day.



Youth Group Activities

Since our last AGM we have held a number of successful Youth Group trips and educational activities. In July of last year 16 young people along with 3 Group leaders enjoyed a 3 day break to Camelot Theme Park in Lancashire, England. The fun filled 3 days comprised touring the theme park, visiting the animals at the resident farm, enjoying the wizardry at the magic shows with quizzes and games providing the entertainment in the evenings.

In November 2005 OSSHG facilitated a 4 week Youth training programme entitled 'Us and Them'. This interactive programme was well attended by Youth Group members and thoroughly enjoyed by all. The course content encouraged the young people to explore the issues which they face in everyday life living in Northern Ireland and helped them explore their identity and role within. The training then finished off with a fun day at the Toddsleap Outdoor Activity Centre.

In August of this year our Youth Group enjoyed a 3 day trip to Culdaff on the Derry/Londonderry border. Activities included Paint balling, rock climbing, a trip to the cinema and an evening bowling. In addition the young people enjoyed a walking tour of the walls of Derry and an educational talk at the Loughside Riverwatch sanctuary. The trip was extremely successful in terms of bringing together a mixed group of young people who otherwise would not have had to opportunity to mix and interact with one another.



Forthcoming Plans

I think you will all agree that this has certainly been a busy and successful year for Omagh Support and Self Help Group. Indeed forthcoming plans for the future indicate that this trend is set to continue with the development of our new Needs Analysis and Action Plan for the next 3 years.

With the introduction of Ms Donna McCauley as Project Officer this forthcoming year will see not only the development of the Archive project and official launch but the increase in collaborative working and developmental work with those families from Bunrana who have been affected by the 1998 atrocity.

In addition recreational and educational courses will continue to form a large part of OSSHG activities with courses such as Sign Language, Introductory Computers, Drawing and Painting, knitting and crochet and Adobe Photoshop to follow later in the year.

The highly popular Monthly Social activities will comprise a trip to an Ulster rugby match, a night of music and entertainment at the Millennium Forum, the popular Christmas shopping trip and Peace concert as well as a host of guest speakers on topics from low calorie cooking to health awareness. This year will also see the continuation of our Complimentary therapy and in house reiki service.

In relation to the Justice Sub-Group's dedication and hard work in advocating on behalf of Victims /Survivors forthcoming meetings include Secretary of State Peter Hein, Minister Michael McDowell and Home Secretary John Reid.

Additional new projects/proposals for the forthcoming year include the commencement of the Carers' Support Service, and the highly innovative Emergency Planning training seminars.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our funders without whom our work would not be possible: the Community Relations Council, Omagh Local Strategy Partnership, Awards for All and the Omagh Fund.

On a final note I would like to thank the Management Committee, members and staff of Omagh Support and Self Help Group for giving me the opportunity to work with you all over the past two years. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at OSSHG, I have met some truly admirable people who have immense courage, bravery and dedication and I will always be indebted to you for the experience and friendship you have shown me over the past 2 years. I wish you all well in your future endeavours and I will always be a friend to the Omagh Support and Self Help Group.

Sharon Watters
Project Co-ordinator
