

## **PROJECT TITLE: A CENTURY LATER**

**Research Partner – Institute for Conflict Research**

**Project Associate/Advisory Organisation – Rainbow Project**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT**

The next ten years marks several commemorative anniversaries, collectively known as the Decade of Centenaries, which shaped Northern Ireland in the 20th century. Anniversaries over the next ten years, which have been highlighted include the Ulster Covenant 2012, First World War 2014, Easter Rising 2016, partition and the Government of Ireland Act 2020.

Many of these anniversaries are potentially contentious. They offer both a challenge and an opportunity to create a better understanding of our past, both over the last century and the last 40 years of the Troubles and Peace process. It is a complex legacy with many interpretations but one, which should allow public debate to create a shared culture of learning, which encourages tolerance and pluralism.

This project, A Century Later, concentrates on groups marginalised in the 20th century to explore their views and experiences, in the expectation that it will bring a fresh dimension to the Decade of Centenaries. There are four documentaries being produced of which this project is one. There are also seminars planned and a series of Digital Stories, mostly with individuals.

### **General themes of the Project**

*Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender communities*

For the majority of the last century, these communities lived under the threat of life imprisonment. Although much has been achieved to bring the LGB & T community in from the margins - through educational, legal, policy and social developments and through improved procedures and attitudes within law enforcement agencies, when violence strikes it is often shocking in its ferocity.

Issues raised have included - social stigma, homophobia, transphobia, abuse, vulnerability to mental health problems and suicide, depression and confidence and acceptance by the mainstream of society.

What needs to be embedded to promote inclusion for the GLB and T communities in the coming century?

### **DRAFT QUESTIONS FOR LGB&T DOCUMENTARY**

*Interviewees are not expected to answer all the interview questions, just what they feel comfortable with, they can respond to everything if they wish or they might like to add questions specific to their interests or something we have not highlighted.*

*The documentary is projected to be 40 minutes long, so obviously there will be restrictions on what we can cover.*

*Each question is accompanied by notes taken from the research to date, which we hope you will find helpful.*

**1. First of all, I wondered about how you felt about commemorations in general?**

*NOTES: This is a short question to lead us into the subject... these are general remarks, but personal to you. You might like to respond on the concept of having commemorations at all, or something general about your experience of commemorative events, for example, Twelfth, Easter Rising, International Women's Day, May Day, Poppy Day, Christmas, Ulster Covenant events 2012, St. Patrick's Day, New Year, Gay Pride etc).*

**2. Much of the history of the LGB&T community over the last 100 years is contained, for example, in prison and court records, health records or is not recorded, remains hidden. How have the LGB&T community tried to create greater awareness of their heritage and history, locally and in Ireland, north/south?**

*NOTES: Discovering a hidden history is an enormous challenge of discovery. We are interested to hear of your experiences, whatever they may be, you don't have to be an expert.*

*Here are some responses from individuals contacted during the research period - Queer archives, historical figures such as Roger Casement, FJ Biggar, attempts to recruit Irish brigade in 1914 from POWs at Limburg ad Lahn and the Hindu German conspiracy, Alan Turing's chemical castration linking to broader contemporary and historical concerns within LGB community of military and armed group responses to LGB people not simply as part of the NI conflict, persecution of LGB and Travellers in second world war, civil partnership act, trans events and history (we filmed the last Trans commemoration so have this film footage also), literature, various Irish writers, arts, etc. Some of the following questions also link to these subject areas.*

*(More than one million gay Germans were targeted, of whom at least 100,000 were arrested and 50,000 were serving prison terms as "convicted homosexuals". Hundreds of European gay men living under Nazi occupation were castrated under court order).*

*There is also a timeline at the end of these questions, though only from 1960s, which may be helpful.*

**3. How would you like to see the contribution of the LGB & T community to society acknowledged?**

*NOTES: It might be helpful to turn this around and think about how the past is commemorated by majorities. For example, these days, many in local government see heritage as an economic resource and linking this to cultural tourism. Designating places and people as part of local heritage has other effects such as determining what the identity of the city is, how minorities and dissidents are remembered or not remembered. National remembering like the Decade of Centenaries produce masses of material, (think remembrance of 1916) – commemorative volumes, official reports, promotional materials, pamphlets, speeches, poems, murals, popular entertainment, souvenirs as well as records of ceremonies and parades. Some see this as marketing tools - places and stories as consumable heritage, cultural tourism. Others see this material as an “attempt at closure”, others as an attempt to find some political consensus. Do you have any thoughts on this? Another way of looking at this might be to consider how LGB&T “identity” in the city and achievements is affected if excluded from this process. It may also be the case that something else is preferable than the traditional process employed above? Current examples? Virtual realities?*

*More recently the women’s movement has tried to redefine the city of Belfast, to gain greater awareness of the contribution of women throughout local history, renaming streets, conducting tours which are woman centred heritage, a kind of mapping of the city accompanied by debates etc. Do you think knowing about a place can support a sense of a shared identity and complex history?*

**4. Any thoughts on how the LGB&T community might complement the activities being planned in relation to the commemorations planned for the Labour Movement in Ireland and Decade of Centenaries?**

*NOTES: The LGB&T community has worked closely with the trade union movement on issues of rights in the workplace and various policies including protection for those with HIV/AIDS. But there may be overlapping histories you think important to discuss?*

**5. The LGB&T community has often commented on the non-sectarian nature of the history of the gay community, in the main, do you think this is recognized by the wider society and what lessons do you think the wider community could learn from this in the attempt to build a “shared history of different allegiances”?**

*NOTES: What is it that you feel unifies the LGB&T community across sectarian divides? Shared community spirit? Identity? Progressive, ahead of its time? Does this still hold true today as it did in the past? Educate rest of society as to how to achieve this? How could the wider society be made aware of your experience?*

**6. Do you feel there is still a need for more acknowledgement from the Assembly/City Council of the contribution of gays and lesbians to British/Irish society, both past and present, how that might be achieved?**

***Could the Decade of Centenaries, (given that it was envisaged as a means to engage with each other in new ways, informed by a deepened historical understanding), help in exploring shared histories?***

*NOTES: Political parties including Sinn Fein and the PUP have asserted the rights of gays and lesbians and the equality agenda is well established. What else might be done? Are there past examples? Is there anything which, needs to happen in the political sphere, so that, LGB&T heritage is made visible in the city/society?*

**7. Have there ever been any exhibitions in local museums or other public buildings, which focus on gay heritage in Ireland or Northern Ireland?**

*NOTES: This relates to the way history is constructed through archives, museums, school curricula, monuments, public events such as national holidays, sporting events, "sacred" places such as cenotaphs and cemeteries. How important is this? Are there past examples? What might you suggest?*

**8. Would it be fair to say that work in schools to create more LGB&T awareness, has centred, understandably around breaking the cycle of prejudice and recognizing the need for education on issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, bullying etc.**

**Are there examples of how local schools have sought to include LGBT Irish/British heritage into the curriculum? What might you suggest?**

*NOTES: see also question 8. Current examples? Literature? Positive role models? Progressive ways to educate, holistic approaches?*

**9. Tremendously positive strides have been made around the Gay Pride parades. Would it be fair to say that visibility is still a key issue/theme? Do you think there is a point at which, LGB&T community, simply just "are" free and equal citizens, and if so, what themes/celebrations would you like to see?**

**Is it possible to be accepted as a part of society, in rather than of society, or is it a case of being forever vigilant? Despite the issues over parades, the heterosexual majority, take the streets and the freedom to perform their own identities for granted?**

*NOTES: see also question 8... for example, one of the Dublin Pride organizers remarked "We have an aspiration that all people who want to show support for the gay community can do so, and also that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people can show their own true colours and show that they are free and equal citizens of our great country". Do you see a time when there is a whole new world out there of acceptance without the need for vigilance? This also relates to other minorities in society too of course.*

**10. How would you like to celebrate the achievements of Irish lesbians, Belfast lesbians?**

*NOTES: Lesbian women have played a part in all of the movements for change in Ireland, yet their contributions have been marginalised or unrecognized. This might partly be because for many of the earlier years (1960-80+), through necessity, they worked behind the scenes. Their energies were often divided between the women's movement and the gay movement. A look at the events and talks planned to date for the Decade of Centenaries shows that there remains little recognition of their contribution to Irish life, north and south. (There is another question for those who are not lesbians on this).*

**11. In general, is it realistic to believe that minorities in society can ever be incorporated into "national" commemorations in any meaningful way, or are they always going to be marginalised?**

**16. How would you like the achievements of the LGB&T to be celebrated in the future?**

### **Time Line**

1967 – Decriminalisation of Homosexual Acts in England/Wales – under Sexual Offences Act

1975 - NIGRA established to campaign for equivalence - Paisley's Save Ulster from Sodomy Campaign (SUFCS) increased activities at City Hall

1980 – Decriminalisation in Scotland

1981 – ECHR Jeffrey Dudgeon v United Kingdom finds in favour of plaintive-breach of Article 8 right to a private life

1982 – Decriminalisation in NI

1991 – 1<sup>st</sup> Belfast Pride Parade (100 people) – *have footage of this.*

1997 – Political of Murder Darren Bradshaw 9.5.1997 – INLA at Parliament

1999 – 1<sup>st</sup> Transgender Day of Remembrance

2003 – Jeff Dudgeon produced controversial book on Casement's Black Diaries

2004 – Under pressure from DUP UK Govt agree to postpone vote on Civil Partnership Bill in light of talks to restore devolved administration. Other wrecking activities undertaken in GB & NI.

2004-2005 – Vince Creelan initiates Gay Police Association PSNI and Mark Donohue sets up 1<sup>st</sup> Gay Traveller Support Group in Ireland

2005 – Civil Partnership Act 2004 enacted – 19.12 NI becomes first part of UK to register civil partnership and ceremony takes place at City Hall between Shannon Sickles and Grainne Close-

2011 – 6.6. Jim Allister NIA question re need for sexual orientation strategy pointing to JB & PR previous connection to SUFSC. Belfast Pride over 25,000 spectators

*Please feel free to ask for further clarification, we want to ensure that we meet as many of your priorities as we can do, within the parameters of the project.*

*Northern Visions, January 2013*