DRAFT WHOLE COMMUNITY SYSTEM FOR RESPONDING TO CONFLICT

Executive Summary:

To support Conflict Resilience in our community, when people are seeking support with dealing with an interpersonal issue, CRG are proposing this system as a practical way forward that offers diverse and accessible options to support effective conflict resolution within our community.

In its 'skeletal' form, the person seeking support contacts the CRG, where requests are triaged, and contact is made with a practitioner who can offer appropriate support.

Such a system is based on the work of Dominic Barter, NVC Trainer and Founder of Restorative Circles, and a frequent workshop leader here in the past.

This consultation paper is a step towards creating a community-wide system for responding to conflict, where anyone looking for support in dealing with an interpersonal conflict, can know how to access such support. The need for such a system, to clarify and support when conflict arises, has been apparent since (even before) the inception of the Conflict Resilience Group, and is one of the key aims of our work.

An ad hoc system is already running on an informal basis, but to make it accessible and recognised community-wide, we need:

1/ Buy in – Consent around using it as a tool
2/ People - (More) who are willing to facilitate
3/ Place – A (preferably dedicated) space where we can attend to our conflicts
4/ Access – A clear, shared way to raise an issue and reach out for support
5/ Information – Clear, accessible information about how to access the system and engage with it.

This paper (see below) explores possibilities for each of these issues, and any clarifying questions and feedback that you can offer us at this stage will be gratefully received.

The next step will be to integrate any feedback received, before consulting more widely with the community. Having consulted on all these different levels, we will then develop a next step proposal to support working with conflict in our community in a way that more enables us to move forward together.

DRAFT PAPER

Introduction

One of the aims of the Conflict Resilience Group has been to

Establish and then support the operation of easily accessible systems that support conflict reconciliation.

In this instance we are using the word ‘system’ to describe a way of identifying the means by which a community member can access support when they find themselves in interpersonal conflict.

Our approach to this has been informed by the work of Dominic Barter (previously a regular workshop leader in our community), who suggests that such a system needs to consider 5 conditions:

1. Buying in – Consent around using it as a tool (Who)
2. People – Who are willing to facilitate (Who)
3. Place – A (preferably dedicated) space, where we can meet to attend to our

   conflicts (Where)
4. Access – A clear, shared way to raise an issue and reach out for support (How)
5. Information – Clear, accessible information about how to access the system and

   engage with it. (How)

An informal ‘system’ has already developed in our community, with people needing support reaching out to the Conflict Resilience Group focaliser (currently David Harrison), who does an initial assessment of need, before identifying (if necessary) one of 7 current community practitioners who could offer support.

Alongside the development of this system, the CRG are developing elements of **community education**, encouraging community members to consider how they can respond to conflict themselves (e.g. practices that help bring oneself back to a centred, grounded position etc), as well as how they can get support from friends/ colleagues to deal with issues, rather than needing higher level intervention. We recognise that the needs emerging from conflict

can be considered as being on a continuum – from self-calming and self-reflection being sufficient in itself, to the need for structured support to enable dialogue to be facilitated. As such, the development of this system should be considered in parallel to this approach of developing a ‘Culture of Peace’.

The purpose of this paper is to consult around our current thinking, and as such, we would be grateful for any feedback that you can offer, before we develop this further

1/ BUYING IN

In order to maximise the potential of getting sufficient consent for the adoption of this system within our community, our intention is to consult on each significant draft, before moving on to the next stage of development. We see reviewing and evaluation as being important components of developing and maintaining such a system.

One possibility that we are considering, is to offer early adoption of this system to smaller sub-communities within our community (e.g. Station House, Soillse etc), before moving into a potential whole community adoption.

A significant question that we are still facing is to who we make this available to (that age-old question of how we define who is and isn’t part of our community?...), and are interested in suggestions which we understand are emerging from discussions between the NFA, EFCBS and the Governance Circle - which would include members of the NFA, EFCBS, as well as Park residents and Park workers.

2/ PEOPLE

As stated earlier, we currently have 7 practitioners in our directory to whom we can refer requests from community members. Between these, we have skills and experience in a trauma informed response, Process Oriented Psychology, restorative justice practices.

We believe that, if this system gets adopted on a wider level within our community, we will need more practitioners. These original 7 practitioners were invited directly by the CRG, following attunement, but our current thinking is that new practitioners would be nominated from within the community – if and when this system has been adopted by the community.

There could be various ways of generating such an expanded list of practitioners. Our current thinking is to put out a call for nominations - either

self-nominations or nominations from at least 2 other community members - for local people who have some experience of conflict facilitation and feel willing and able to be part of such a system. The CRG could then have the role of checking that these nominees do have a reasonable level of experience: e.g. have facilitated at least 3 conflicts. Note that this would not be a vetting of the *quality* of the facilitators' abilities, just a check that they have some experience. We also will consider how and why practitioners can be removed from the directory.

Users of the system would be offered a feedback form (on paper or online), which they would give or send to both the practitioner and to the CRG group. This would provide a feedback loop for identifying both needs for improvement and complaints that need to be dealt with.

In order to help community members make an informed choice as to which practitioner to use for their situation (depending on availability) we intend to create a 'tick box' of what each practitioner can offer. For example whether they can offer individual and/or group level session; are Trauma Informed, are Neurodivergence aware, or are a member of a professional body etc.

A further issue that may inform community members choices, is the issue of payment. Some practitioners offer (within reason) the work as part of their community service, some ask for donations, and some ask for a fixed fee. We are wanting to make this work available to all community members, and are exploring the possibility of setting up a bursary fund through the NFA.

Alongside development of this system, we are considering whether we may offer/ require a level of supervision for our practitioners, and would be looking to establish suitable support for the practitioners. We would gather information from them as to whether they receive supervision and how often. Our current thinking is that we could also set up peer group supervision with a suitably experienced supervisor. This would be particularly helpful for those who do not have their own supervision.

3/ PLACE:

Currently, some practitioners choose to offer sessions in their own homes – as a more personal and neutral space. However, we are currently exploring the possibility of finding a 'dedicated space' for this work (e.g. Moontree – the former Park Garden team base).

One advantage of having a dedicated space could be easy access to

supportive material/items – e.g. laminated sheets describing the ‘Clearing’ process, Restorative Circle process, Feelings & needs lists, ‘talking stick’, peace candles etc.

We recognise that we need to take into consideration issues, such as accessibility, and it may be that we’ll need a range of options (maybe including the YP Building and/or the CCC Hoosie?), which may also raise questions of venue hire booking and cost etc. We would suggest that Auchernack House might be a suitable venue for those who live in and around Forres.

One possibility that we are also currently exploring is developing a ‘directory’ of possible venues with clear information regarding accessibility, hiring details etc. Within this, we recognise that not all conflicts will require a facilitator, and that just reminding people of the power of a walk in nature together, or the use of the new Peace Bench, can support people in finding the right space for the work that they need to do.

We would imagine that the costs of a session (any room hire and/or practitioner’s fee) would be shared equally between the parties, with a bursary fund being available if this precluded anybody from using this service.

4/ ACCESS:

Having considered other options (e.g. Listener Convenors?), we believe that the most appropriate first point of contact for community members seeking support, is, as is currently true, the focaliser of the CRG. We also need to consider whether or not this could eventually be a paid role.

We have considered the possibility of just creating an (online) directory of practitioners, from which community members can directly approach a practitioner for support. However, we recognise that making first contact through the CRG focaliser, offers a more immediate opportunity to talk through the issues, to identify steps that the community member may be able to do themselves, and also offers a ‘triage’ type approach to identify who might most appropriately be available to offer support. If this is the route we choose to go down, we will develop a set of questions that will support the triage process.

Using the CRG focaliser as an access point also allows us as a community to monitor the number and nature of conflicts for which facilitation is sought.

Part of the thinking in considering the LCs as a first point of call, was that it would help them be aware of issues and themes emerging in the community. However, we recognise that our LCs are already stretched, and that the CRG focaliser could inform them of any issues that come to them which reflect wider issues in the community.

In terms of how community members could access support, we are currently suggesting either a dedicated email address or phone number (asking people to message first), and a slot in the General Office and Auchernack House, that people can post a request to.

The NFA Peacekeepers currently have a constitutional role in responding to particular kinds of conflict situations, as specified in the NFA constitution. Whilst this continues, the triage person would need to take this into consideration while providing suggestions of possible sources of support.

As stated previously, we know that not all conflicts require a 3rd person facilitator, and as such, we will be making available an accessible 'tool kit' to support un-facilitated conversations.

The first round of feedback, raised the issue of accountability - Who is ultimately accountable if things go awry? We were asked if this would require the CRG to become incorporated, in order to protect the group, or do we become incorporated within an extant organisation? We believe that the natural place for this system (but not the CRG itself) to sit, would be as a service of the NFA (cf The Boutique). However, in its present form, the NFA is unincorporated.

5/ INFORMATION:

As well as putting detailed information on our webpage on the NFA website (findhorn.cc), our intention is to have a variety of ways of making people aware of the system:

1. Physical – Posters/ Regular articles in the Rainbow Bridge/ Information on Park Connected and other community social media – all of which could include a QR code to give quick access to our webpage.
2. In person – Presentation in Community Meetings/ Sunday Slots/ Conversation Cafes/ Word of mouth/ training in Nonviolent Communication & Restorative Circles

We recognise that some people may be put off by the term 'mediation'. As

such, we could include alternative wording, including ‘supported conversations’ and ‘conflict facilitation’.

We need to offer clear information about what’s available, potential costs, the role of attunement etc.

Your feedback:

We are grateful for any feedback/ suggestions/ amendments and comments that you can offer, which we could consider in preparing a next draft of this paper to circulate more widely, and inform the next steps in developing a community wide system. Please send to crgfocaliser@gmail.com

With gratitude. In community.

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