Summary of Projects

1. Community Training
   Aim: To provide education and training on Conflict Intervention and Community Relations.

2. Community Support
   Aim: To provide mediative assistance to those affected by conflict in the community.

3. Local Mediation
   Aim: To establish a network of individuals and groups providing assistance to conflict in their localities.

4. Public Sector
   Aim: To assist public institutions to contribute to Community Relations in Northern Ireland.

5. Parades
   Aim: To assist communication between those in dispute about parades in Northern Ireland.

6. Parades Commission
   Aim: To assist the Parades Commission by supervising the work of its Authorised Officers.

7. Policing Our Divided Society
   Aim: To assist the evolution of policing and Community Relations in Northern Ireland.

8. Political Dialogue
   Aim: To improve understandings across political boundaries.

9. Peace To The City
   Aim: To contribute to the World Council of Churches “Programme to Overcome Violence”.

10. Churches
    Aim: To assist the Churches in Northern Ireland to develop their resources for issues of conflict.
Mediation and Peace-Building
(An introduction to The Mediation Network for Northern Ireland)

The Mediation Network for Northern Ireland was established in 1991 by a group of individuals who had been organising mediation training since 1986. The Network promotes the use of Third Party intervention in disputes and supports creative responses to conflict in Northern Ireland society.

In 1992, Brendan McAllister became the Director and first employee of the Mediation Network. A Development Assistant, Clare Morrison, joined later that year. In 1995 Joe Campbell (Assistant Director) took up his post. In 1997, we added two Development Officers, Doug Baker and Peter O'Reilly; an Executive Officer, Lea Turkington; and an Administrative Assistant, Dolores Murtagh. A third Development Officer, Audrey McMurrugh will commence work in 1998. We also engage the services of sixteen sessional workers, principally as trainers and facilitators. We provide various support and guidance to about fifty practitioners across Northern Ireland.

The Mediation Network seeks to promote a culture of Third Party intervention in conflict. We wish to foster an awareness that conflict can be ‘processed’ in ways which are positive and helpful. For too long in our society, people have lived with the notion that conflict offers two alternatives: Fight or Flight - a belief that, if you are strong enough, you can fight in conflict and, if you feel too weak, you can take flight from it and engage in avoidance. After more than a quarter of a century of violent conflict, we aim to capitalise on a growing awareness among our people that fighting and/or avoidance have not served us well, and that more creative responses to conflict must be utilised.

In Northern Ireland, mediation is an example of a transition from peace-keeping to peace-building, an understanding of how peace really works. Peace-making involves more than condemnation of violence. ‘Peace’ is built and shaped, gradually, over decades and generations, a task that involves the gradual transformation of a conflictual society. Peace-building must become an organic phenomenon, at work at all levels of our society, rather than the traditional, narrow view of peace being negotiated by political leaders alone. Central to the concept of building peace, is a belief in the fundamental importance of relationships based on respect and dignity.

Mediation is one way in which we have been assisting in the task of establishing greater trust and respect in relationships across our divided society.
Chairperson’s Report

When first sitting down to draft this report I was tempted to use complicated language and lengthy sentences; but I quickly realised it shouldn’t be that way. Mediation, with whatever definition we place upon it, ought to be something of use to our entire community; we don’t all use complicated language and lengthy sentences.

And so: how has the last year been for the Mediation Network for Northern Ireland? Three words capture the essence of this time for me. Energy, Consolidation and Advance.

Its energy can be best illustrated in the commitment and dedication shown by all the staff, often working long hours and often to nearly impossible deadlines. The Network has consolidated upon the developmental work of previous years when the concept of mediation was being promoted. Mediation, as a method of achieving ‘new understandings’ among those in conflict with one another, is becoming more clearly understood right across our community.

The Network has also experienced the departure of a number of dear colleagues, both staff and board members, who played a crucial role in this consolidation. Space does not permit me to mention them by name. They will know and should be proud of what they have helped the organisation achieve. Physically we have advanced into new premises. We wish to establish ourselves here, but already our space is well used. During the year we also legally ‘advanced’ to become a limited company. This has meant among other things, the appointment of a Board of Trustees. As some colleagues from the previous Executive Committee have departed, new individuals have arrived as Trustees. Already their individual energies and expertise have been invaluable. This will help us grow.

As we come to the end of our year we are preparing to draft our Corporate Plan which will direct our work and support our vision for the next three years. Often success is measured in very tangible criteria. I would hope that our success may be gauged by the impact we can have in important sectors of our community. However, by the nature of our work, this may be less tangible. Even as I write I am confident that we are continuing to have impact within specific neighbourhoods where we have judged we can be of assistance. Our link to the churches has been important and we have toiled with issues that have exercised our entire community, namely parades and policing. We remain a small, extremely energetic partnership of people, staff and trustees committed to all our people and we are confident that in the year ahead we can continue to provide a valuable service to the community.

Martin McAnallen
29 May 1998

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Director's Report

In reviewing the 1997-98 year, I notice an interesting transition going on in the Mediation Network. We have begun to care less about resolving conflict and more about managing enmity. In their highly regarded book, “The Promise of Mediation”, Baruch Bush and Joe Folger observe that the practice of mediation in the U.S.A. has been too preoccupied with reaching an agreement. According to Bush and Folger, people should appreciate the chemistry at work in a good mediation process. Respectful engagement brings humanity to the fore in disputes between human beings at odds with each other.

In Northern Ireland, many of our people aren’t ready to love their enemies; aren’t ready to live without the enemy outside the door. Now, rather than whinge or sermonise about this fact of life here, we have built this kind of realism into our activities on behalf of the Mediation Network. ‘Conflict Resolution’ remains an aspiration for the future. ‘Conflict Management’, living with our disagreements, is a basic assumption to much of our work.

Over the past year, we have continued to bring a mediative presence to bear in five sectors in the life of our society: the voluntary sector; the churches; public organisations; the justice system and political affairs.

Within these sectors we are engaged in ten projects which have stretched the capacities of our seven member staff team and various sessional workers.

The Five Areas Project of 1996-97 matured into the Local Mediation Project of 1998, helped along by a grant from the International Fund for Ireland (the I.F.I.) This project aims to assist the}

emergence of a network of trained practitioners based in their home localities across Northern Ireland. Professor John Paul Lederach and his colleagues at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia have been most helpful with this area of our work. It has been gratifying to observe former trainees utilising mediative concepts to underpin innovative work across a range of Community Relations practice, from community justice to trauma healing.
Director’s Report continued

The Community Training Project, again part-funded by the I.F.I., provides a wide constituency with a variety of training on such subjects as Self Awareness, Community Awareness, Conflict Intervention, and Mediation. Within this project, Open College accreditation is being built upon over the next year as we develop four grades of competence for mediation practitioners in Northern Ireland. Members of our growing Practitioners’ Register will be categorised according to their progress through the grades and the Mediation Network will continue to act as a clearing house for disputes which are amenable to mediation.

Our Public Sector Project formalises our increasing activities as consultants and trainers for public bodies willing to address the challenges involved in administering a divided society. Fundamental to this work is the recognition that the vast majority of citizens in Northern Ireland tend to come from backgrounds which are predominantly Catholic or Protestant; predominantly Unionist or Nationalist. Historically, we have done well by living in denial of many of the things which tend to cause division in our circles of friends and work mates in Northern Ireland. The Mediation Network views such denial as a luxury which we can no longer afford if we want to develop institutions to serve a pluralist, integrated future for our society and its oncoming generations of citizens.

Most controversially, we have taken this debate into the Royal Ulster Constabulary (R.U.C.) with the
Director's Report continued

project, “Policing Our Divided Society”. We have been grateful for funding from the United States Information Agency and the British Government for this work, in which we engage in regular dialogue with a group of senior officers concerning the concept of Community Policing and the ethos of policing in Northern Ireland.

The Mediation Network believes it has a responsibility to provide Third Party assistance to issues which involve serious conflict and threaten the quality of life of citizens in Northern Ireland. In this respect, the Parades conflict provides all of us with danger and opportunity: danger because the issue of parades arouses the ancestral tribal instincts of many of us, reviving age-old quarrels; opportunity, because with parades, we can apply the most enlightened thinking available as the world approaches a new millennium.

In supervising Authorised Officers for the Parades Commission, we aim to build up an infrastructure to support the community in its efforts to manage and, ultimately, resolve this most intractable problem.

It has been marvellous to observe the rapid growth of our Churches Project and to sense the desire of clergy, across the churches, for enhanced skills in dealing with conflict, both within the church and in the life of local communities.

During the past year, the Mediation Network moved to new offices, became a limited company, and recruited four new staff. In all of this, we are grateful for the support of our Board of Trustees; for our funders; for our associates and friends. Above all, we are grateful to the large number of individuals and groups across the community who have placed their trust in us by asking us for assistance in working collaboratively with our staff.

In the summer of 1997, after three years of selfless and loyal service, John and Naomi Lederach (two American volunteers) returned home to Indiana. We are forever grateful to them for their support to the Mediation Network in its tender years. Long serving members of our board also moved on: Joan Broder, Jerry Tyrrell, Anne O’Kelly and Steve Williams. These people worked hard to establish the practice of mediation in Northern Ireland.

This annual report is dedicated to them with an enduring sense of gratitude.
The Programme of the Mediation Network

Community Training and Support

With two additional members of staff added to our team in 1997, we have been able to satisfy more of the training demands made on us over the 1997-1998 year. Almost 1000 people have participated in training programmes. Our six day Conflict Transformation Workshop, run twice during the year, proved popular with a wide range of community activists. Now accredited by the Open College Network, we continue to refine and develop this programme. Among courses run for public service bodies was a three day Conflict Skills course for the staff of Making Belfast Work, a six day programme run in conjunction with the University of Ulster and Future Ways Trust on community relations themes for trainers in a range of public bodies; further planning and development work with staff from the Housing Executive on mediation practice and a series on conflict intervention with some of the district councils' community relations staff.

During October at the invitation of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust we ran a major programme of six peacebuilding seminars across Northern Ireland for groups in receipt of European financial support for their work. Some 700 people attended, giving us the opportunity to lay out the concept of having short, medium and long term strategies for community relations work at grass roots level.

As always, we have worked with large and small community organisations in improving their capacity to respond creatively to conflict, both within and outside of their organisations. Several days were spent with staff from a range of housing associations on conflict themes; students considering community relations issues; staff from Extern on mediation skills; the WAVE organisation on conflict skills and staff and volunteers from EPIC, the ex prisoners organisation, on restorative justice skills training.

We have now developed a Register of Practitioners, consisting of people we have trained over recent years. We will be working to enable people to further develop their skills and move through each of 5 grades, providing for our community an increasing number of skilled mediators in community relations work.

During July - December we benefited from the skills and experience of Professor Harry Mika from Central Michigan University in the United States. Harry is a criminologist who is widely recognised as an expert in restorative justice. He spent his sabbatical working out of our office and was a valued, and supportive member of our staff team.
Parades

The Parades Commission was established in the spring of 1997 and was conferred with statutory powers and responsibilities early in 1998. Already, in its young life, the Parades Commission has itself been the subject of controversy as it struggles for credibility in the eyes of the whole community in Northern Ireland.

After careful consideration, the Mediation Network agreed to assist the Commission by training and managing a team of Authorised Officers who represent the Parades Commission on the ground in Northern Ireland.

We anticipated that many people would view our involvement with the Parades Commission as damaging to our reputation as an impartial mediation agency. In this respect, such a view is mistaken because the Mediation Network approaches the parades conflict as, fundamentally, a Community Relations problem. At least, it is a challenge to the main traditions of Northern Ireland to establish mutually respectful relationships between the parading tradition and those who live in localities affected by parades.

The principle of Mutual Respect is itself fundamental to the concept of mediation. Therefore, the parades problem is an ethical imperative for the Mediation Network and we have embraced this challenge expecting to be misunderstood but hoping, ultimately, to be vindicated for our integrity in this most serious Community Relations crisis in Northern Ireland.

Beyond our work for the Parades Commission we have retained our right to function independently, building on insights gained through our involvement in the Parades dispute since 1995. Our hope for the future is to assist the parading tradition to evolve in tandem with the changes of our time, with the loyal orders finding ways to celebrate their customs within a pluralist society where difference is accommodated.

Policing

Our policing project began in October 1997 when a Working Group from the Mediation Network began a process of long term dialogue with senior officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (R.U.C.). We were glad to partner the Conflict Management Group (associates of the Harvard Negotiation Project), from Cambridge, Massachusetts, in organising an exchange programme with the Citizens Committee for New York City, the New York Police Department and members of the R.U.C. over the past year.

Again, the Mediation Network recognises the range of conflicting emotions which policing excites in Northern Ireland. As with our work on parades, we expect to be misunderstood by many. However one
Policing continued

views the future of the R.U.C., it is clear that policing remains a key measurement of the health of our society and of the state of Community Relations. In our work, we seek to bring a Community Relations perspective to bear on this issue.

We believe that, aside from the politics of policing, there is value in building relationships with a group of senior police and providing opportunities for them to quietly reflect on their organisation’s past, present and future. In time, we would hope to facilitate the work of reconciliation by applying our insights to dialogue around law and order.

Political Dialogue

Our activities within the field of politics are based on a single aim: to promote creative dialogue across political boundaries. This involves the maintenance of relationships with individuals across the parties in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and Great Britain. It includes many, many conversations aimed at assisting individuals to think more inclusively of their opponents and their needs.

Over the past year, we continued to share ideas about the design of the Peace Process, and we maintained our relationship with paramilitary prisoners from all the groupings within the Maze prison. There were also occasions to provide mediative assistance between prisoners and the authorities.

It is heartening to complete this review of the past year with a note of satisfaction at the conclusion of the Talks Process and the prospect of political life largely free from the shadow of violence. Of course, our politics remain uncertain and insecure, as political leaders move to engage each other. The Mediation Network will offer support to their endeavours and look forward with optimism to a time of peace and our continuing journey towards societal reconciliation.
The Local Mediation Project

Through the Local Mediation Project we aim to develop, maintain and support a network of locally based mediation practitioners in Northern Ireland.

This project reflects the Mediation Network’s belief that the best people to help with neighbourhood disputes are those with the local knowledge and credibility; individuals with sensitivity to the needs of their neighbourhood; whose commitment is trusted and repeated by those in dispute.

The project has its origins in our Five Areas Project of 1996-97, when we ran an eighteen month training programme for more than 20 practitioners from Belfast, Derry and Portadown.

In the past year, we supported Tanya Gallagher and her colleagues in the Peace and Reconciliation Group in Derry with their newly established training programme, “Opportunities Beyond Conflict”, over a period of six weeks. Efforts to support a training initiative in the Bogside-Brandywell area did not prove fruitful.

There were similar frustrations in north Belfast, trying to establish conditions for a new training scheme. Our difficulties were compounded by other demands on our time, particularly our commitments with the Parades Commission.

However, by May 1998, we were please to commence the 1998 Local Mediation Project with twelve practitioners drawn from Belfast, Strabane, Enniskillen and Portadown.

By the end of 1998, this group will undergo training in advance mediation and concepts of peace building. The commitment to the equivalent of three working weeks, by busy community workers, is indeed encouraging. The variety of experience and background of the participants, together with the planned input, ensures that a lot of shared wisdom can lead to the development of skills and practice ‘on the ground’.

It is hoped that work done through this project will, in conjunction with work in Community Training, open up the possibility of, amongst other things, localised mediation services in several areas.
The Practitioners Forum

The Practitioners Forum was begun to facilitate training and support for practitioners in the field of community relations. During the past year it has met three times now, with inputs from Harry Mika (Restorative Justice), Karin Eyben (CR Definitions & Widening Applications) and Brendan McAllister (Concepts Underlying Peace Building in N.I.). We have been in discussion with the Community Relations Council (CRC) with regard to how overlaps with other gatherings (e.g. The CRC’s Local Activists Forum) and the development of the Practitioners Forum can be addressed. The plans for four quarterly gatherings in the next academic year are moving ahead.
The Churches Project

The Churches Project aims to enhance the skills of clergy and lay leaders for constructively handling conflicts which arise within church life and to support churches and inter-church groups in responding creatively to wider conflicts in society.

During the past year Mediation Network staff have provided ongoing training and support for the Conciliation Panel set up by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and begun discussions with other denominations about the possibility of similar in-depth training for a number of their members who would then be available to mediate requests for introductory sessions for several inter-church clergy groups and as part of ongoing leadership training in various denominations. Finally, we have been involved in mediation and conflict counselling around a number of church conflicts.

Work within particular denominations has included close liaison with the Presbyterian Church Peacemaking Committee on the planning of a number of conferences aimed at increasing local initiatives in peacebuilding; with the Church of Ireland Diocese of Down and Dromore on the development of a Cross-Community Bridge Building Programme; with a Church of Ireland committee developing resources to assist parishes in addressing sectarianism and responding to a request from the Redemptorist Order to participate with them in assessing how their members and places of ministry in Northern Ireland can contribute more directly to the work of reconciliation.

There have been a number of opportunities to assist in long-term development planning of inter-church initiatives such as the Armagh Churches Forum, the Lisburn Inter-Church Project, and the Ballyholme Inter-Church Group. And there have been numerous opportunities to facilitate dialogue on political issues with inter-church groups of clergy and lay people, including the North Belfast Clergy, the Clonard-Fitzroy Fellowship, the Harmony Hill - St Colman’s Group, and an inter-church group in Portadown.

Finally, contact with many groups linking churches or church people with local community issues has been maintained through the Community Work...
The Churches Project continued

from a Christian Perspective Network coordinated by the Mediation Network as part of the Churches Project. This has included being asked to facilitate planning processes and offer training on handling conflict for groups such as Forthspring and the Lisburn YMCA.

The Churches Project is funded by the International Fund for Ireland, beginning in 1997. Funding will continue over the next three years.

Peace To The City Project

As part of their ‘Programme to Overcome Violence’, in the past year the World Council of Churches established a campaign called “Peace to the City” and invited The Mediation Network to be the local partner for Belfast. The campaign is an effort to encourage churches and other groups to respond to the rise of violence in many forms around the world by highlighting work for peace already taking place.

Seven cities have been selected for particular attention: Boston (USA), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Durban (South Africa), Kingston (Jamaica), Suva (Fiji), and Belfast. The programme seeks not only to report on developments in such places but also to encourage creative links between these cities and with others working for peace in different settings.

The Mediation Network is responsible for production of a monthly internet bulletin with stories of peace-building efforts by various groups in Belfast. We are also co-operating with the WCC on the production of a book and video as a means of sharing lessons learned in our setting which may be of use to those seeking to address violence in other situations.

The project will continue until December 1998 when the next Assembly of the World Council of Churches meets in Harare, Zimbabwe. At that time there will be opportunities for those involved in the campaign to present workshops and reports which it is hoped will help to inform the churches about possible actions which they may take beyond 1998 in seeking to overcome violence. It is hoped that we in the Mediation Network may also continue to build on the many local and international connections established through this project.
Building for the Future

This year, 1997/98, will certainly go down in history as an important time for Northern Ireland. There have been changes of government in both London and Dublin in May and June 1997. An inclusive talks process that began in September, led to a political agreement on Good Friday 1998. This led to a referendum to approve the Agreement in May, which was accepted by a majority vote. (Elections took place in June to elect a new 108 member Assembly). There is no straight and short road to peace. We must make the road, piece by piece, as we walk along it. While we have come a long way and we will not go backwards - there will be many challenges up ahead. We in the Mediation Network will continue to provide mediative assistance, community relations education, and conflict intervention strategies to those who seek our help.

In the coming year, we will support the growth of mediation practitioners across Northern Ireland. We will introduce procedures for accreditation of mediators and their ongoing training. We will continue to respond to community tension and conflict, while developing and refining our practice. We will design new training programmes and provide support to community, voluntary and public sector organisations, as well as all main church denominations.

We are grateful for many individuals and groups at home and overseas who encourage us by their visits, or contribute to our training projects using experience gained in other parts of the world. Thanks also to our friends and families who keep our feet on the ground and remind us of the important things in life. We also thank the many funding bodies without whose financial support, the road to peace would be a very rough track. In particular we are grateful for the financial support of the Community Relations Council, the International Fund for Ireland, the Central Community Relations Unit, the Ireland Fund, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., the World Council of Churches, and the United States Information Agency.
Treasurer’s Report

The 1997-98 financial year has seen a significant improvement in the financial position of the agency. Overall our income has doubled, exceeding the increase in expenditure and thereby allowing us to replenish some of the reserves we were obliged to draw upon in the previous year. We received a welcome increase in our core funding this year, but by far the greater part of our increased income derived from grants for specific programmes. Last year, grant/programme funding constituted 22% of our income, while this year, it constitutes 46%. Expenditure on salaries and pensions has increased this year, due to the addition of three full time members of staff. This year, there was substantial one-off expenditure on office equipment, reflecting the move to a new premises and the increase in staff numbers. We were glad to receive substantial help from the CCRU in meeting this expenditure.

A financial systems audit was carried out by Coopers and Lybrand which made useful recommendations concerning the accounting system. As a consequence, a more sophisticated accounting package has been purchased and brought into use. This will enable staff to maintain greater control over costs, allow the production of more informative reports on true income and expenditure and make it possible to do the accounts on an accrual basis. It will also allow us to have a greater understanding of the costs and revenues of each project area.

I should like to record my thanks for the thorough and efficient work of our new Executive Officer, Lea Turkington, who is in charge of our financial systems and of the sympathetic help we have received from our accountant, Lowry Grant.
Administrative Report

Since our last report the administrative side of The Mediation Network has changed considerably. In order to meet our administrative needs, we appointed an Executive Officer, Lea Turkington, to supervise the day-to-day operation of the office, including all financial and personnel issues.

This was also the year when John and Naomi Lederach, two Mennonite volunteers from the United States who had been with us for three years, left for home. As a result, we employed our Administrative Assistant, Dolores Murtagh. She arrived in October, and we were able to have her well in place by the time Clare Morrison left for her maternity leave.

In addition to a growing staff, and a growing workload, this was the year when we began to look at our management and filing systems to determine what changes needed to be made. We are now implementing a new accounting system and a new project management system. Clare Morrison, who has been promoted to the role of Development Assistant, will play a key role in the operation of the new project management system.

The number of overseas friends and other visitors continued to increase over the year. They have come from all corners of the world, including Norway, the United States, Canada, France and South Africa. There have been constant requests for mediative assistance for a range of disputes: noise between neighbours; land and property rights; workplace conflicts; large disputes with a Community Relations dimension such as parades and general tension across the secretarian interfaces of Northern Ireland.

We look forward to the challenges ahead and are sure the next year will bring with it exciting and demanding new work.
SECTORS:
The Mediation Network has identified a number of sectors in the life of our society where the N. Ireland conflict expresses itself and where mediative activity can be of help.

- The Community - assisting community workers and other activists to deal with conflict in their own localities. When appropriate, the Mediation Network works directly at communal conflict.
- Politics - using mediation to enhance political interaction.
- The Justice System - providing a mediative perspective on policing, offending and the prison system.
- The Churches - training clergy and church activists as resource people to address conflict in local communities.
- The Public Sector - assisting public bodies and institutions to improve their strategies for serving a divided society.