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OFMDFM Junior Minister Jennifer McCann alongside the leaders of a North Belfast community and university partnership have warmly congratulated trainees of a dealing with the past human rights programme.

Chief Executive of Ashton Community Trust (ACT) Paul Roberts and Director of the Transitional Justice Institute (TJI) at Ulster University Rory O’Connell presented certificates to trainees of the inaugural *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit Trainers Programme* at a residential event held in Lusty Beg Island, Saturday January 16, 2016 in County Fermanagh. Chair of the Victims & Survivors Service Board Oliver Wilkinson also attended the event and praised all those involved.

“TJI is delighted to congratulate this graduating cohort of this most innovative training programme,” TJI Director Rory O’Connell said.

“The programme is path-breaking in facilitating discussion and debate about transitional justice at a grassroots level. Effectively implementing transitional justice requires that it be locally owned and developed, not simply imposed from above.”

The highly innovative community-university accredited training programme began on 30 September 2015, and completed with a theory to practice residential Jan 15-17 2016. After recruitment, 12 successful trainees were selected from localities including Lisburn, Belfast, Limavady and Helens Bay.

ACT Chief Executive Paul Roberts added: “These newly skilled individuals have all worked extremely hard to get to this point. The Toolkit Programme and User’s Guide were informed by insights gathered from communities in North & West Belfast but we know this programme will connect with many others. It was created locally but the framework is transferable globally and we very much hope that other societies emerging from conflict can use it to facilitate some hard but necessary conversations required in the pursuit of social justice, regeneration and peace.”

The community university partnership receives support from the Victims & Survivors Service on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). OFMDFM Junior Minister Jennifer McCann has supported the partnership since 2012 when the *Transitional Justice Grassroots Engagement Report* and *Toolkit* were launched in Crumlin Road Gaol. In 2014 she launched the *User’s Guide* alongside former Junior Minister Jonathan Bell. Praising the work and those involved Junior Minister Jennifer McCann said:

**“For many, the trauma inflicted during the years of the conflict continues to blight the lives of victims, survivors and communities today.  While our society has made great strides towards peace and stability it is essential we do not leave behind those who continue to suffer.**

**“This is a challenging and complex area, and the training course is the latest initiative from the Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme.  I congratulate the graduates and all those involved in its development for their continued dedication to helping those affected by the conflict move forward on their personal journey.  OFMDFM has provided over £14million funding this year to support the Victims sector and I am pleased that, through the VSS, we were able to support this innovative and progressive programme.”**

Head of Victims & Mental Health Services at ACT Irene Sherry said she was delighted to see more people equipped to deliver the *Toolkit* to communities affected by the legacy of the conflict:

“This training programme has been created locally but is transferable globally and we know that it speaks to universal experiences of conflict and transition. We are delighted to see the trainees complete the programme and in the coming weeks and months work to engage with the wider victims and survivors sector to deliver this *Toolkit* to others.”

The training has been developed in partnership between ACT through its Bridge of Hope department and TJI at Ulster University over the last five years. The programme’s very first batch of trainers will be expected to deliver a supported *Toolkit* programme to victims and survivors of the conflict in the coming months.

The Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP) is also a supporter of the partnership. Eilish Rooney, TJI Senior Lecturer, has played a critical leadership role since inception and has authored four booklets on the work: *Transitional Justice Grassroots Engagement* (2012); *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit* (2012) available in English, Spanish and Arabic; *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit User’s Guide* (2014) and *Transitional Justice Grassroots Toolkit Trainer’s Manual (2016)*.

TJI Senior Lecturer Eilish Rooney said: "This programme is a tremendous example of community leadership and academic partnership. TJI hope to develop the programme with other partners internationally."

TJI Director Rory O’Connell added: “This programme is vital in enabling grassroots level understanding of transitional justice, seeking to build on the knowledge rooted in the lived experiences of the participants. Such work is not possible without well-developed partnerships and we are very proud to partner with our friends in Bridge of Hope to deliver this training. TJI's contribution has been led by Eilish Rooney and the training bears the marks of her intellectual leadership and commitment.”

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Notes to editors:

From 2011 Bridge of Hope and TJI have worked to build a programme that empowers local people to explore how individual lives and societies are changed by conflict and transition.

To date the work has been delivered to over 120 people living within areas as diverse as Falls, Shankill, Mount Vernon, Tigers Bay and New Lodge. It has also been successfully delivered on a cross community context as well as a gender basis. It is now also available to students undertaking the BSc Hons Community Development degree at Ulster. Materials published as a resource to the programme have attracted attention from Syria, Kenya and other conflict zones around the world. The programme itself was described as ‘inspirational’ by a leading human rights NGO in Zimbabwe during the 2015 TJI Summer School. TJI Professor Monica McWilliams, formerly Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, has described the programme as truly unique and has used the Toolkit in her human rights work with women in Syria.

For more information on the Transitional Justice Grassroots Programme contact Ashton Community Trust Head of Victims & Mental Health Services Irene Sherry 028 9074 6737.

For more details about the Victims & Survivors Service see [www.victimsservice.org](http://www.victimsservice.org)

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