

14 *Qualm*

*"At the very start of Noah going missing I put my trust as a member of the public in the authorities. I knew no different. My eyes are wide open now. This investigation, my mind is blown by how little the police seem to have done. We as a family have done quite a bit of investigation ourselves and we dispute their line of inquiry."*

Fiona Donohoe, mother of Noah



NOAH's home, east Belfast © Sabine Troendle, 2021

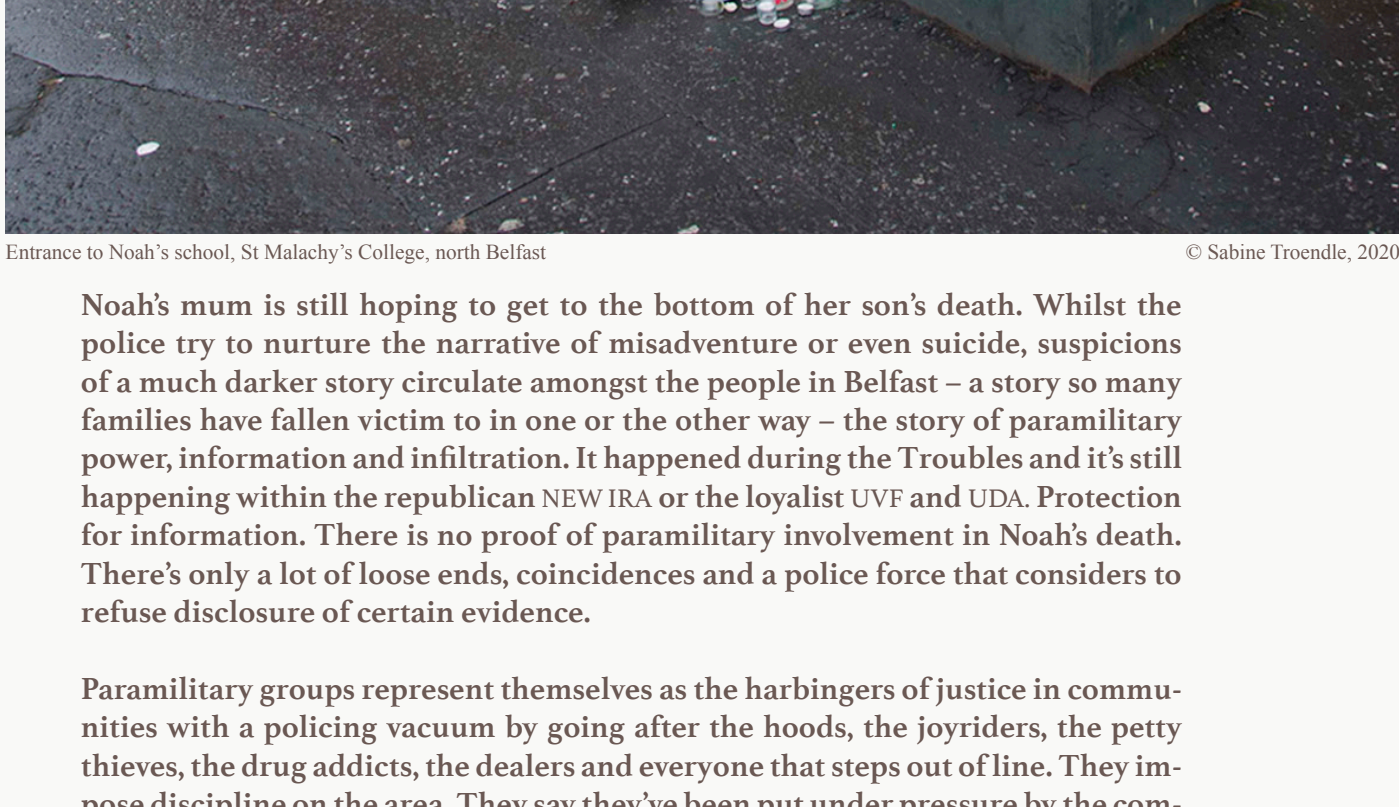
In the summer of 2020 Noah Donohoe, a 14 year old boy from south Belfast went missing while on his way to Cavehill to meet his friends. After an extensive six-days search he was found in a storm drain in an area of Belfast unknown to him. The pathology report states that Noah had drowned. He was naked. His computer has been found – a drug addict tried to sell it. His bicycle has been found in an area Noah wouldn't have gone to. Parts of his clothes were found. Witnesses had seen him running up the street naked. CCTV footage shows Noah distressed and exhausted. As a legacy of the Troubles, Belfast is heavily equipped with surveillance but there's a whole stretch where CCTV footage of Noah is missing. Noah was a Catholic boy of mixed race, happy and popular in school, he loved sports, basketball and his cello. He never gave his mommy Fiona any bother. The police very early into the investigation said, no foul play was at stake. Noah might have fallen from the bike, hit his head, got confused, went into the storm drain and drowned. They never took rumours of Noah having been drowned in a bath tub and loyalist paramilitary involvement seriously. The water in the storm drain has never been compared with the water in Noah's lungs.



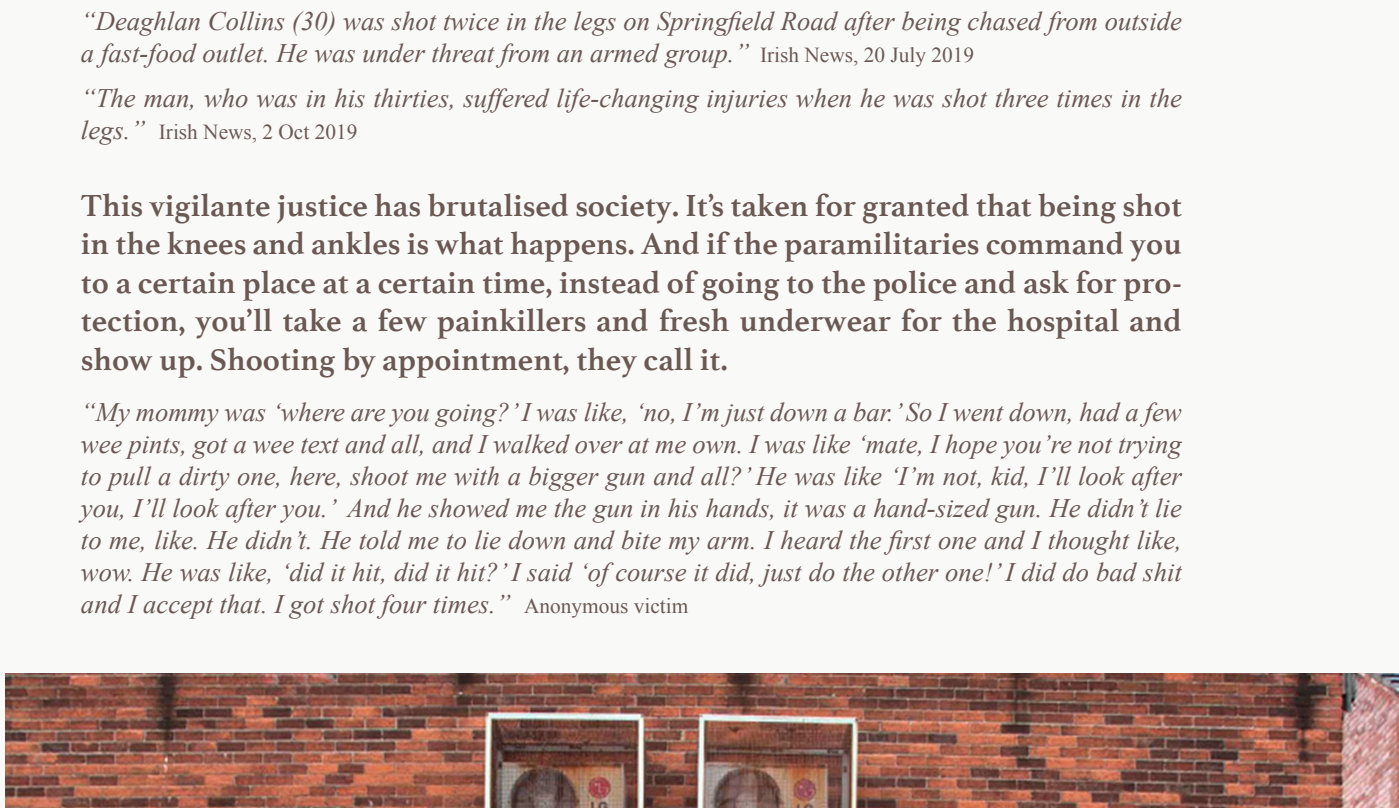
PSNI STOP HIDING NOAH'S KILLER, New Lodge © Sabine Troendle, 2021

It is a very sensitive and controversial inquest and many unanswered questions, investigative shortcomings and a looming PUBLIC INTEREST IMMUNITY (PII) certification request by the police in order to withhold evidence that – in their estimation – could be damaging to public interest feeds into presumptions of loyalist paramilitary machination. The most common reason for a PII request is paramilitary, intelligence or informer involvement.

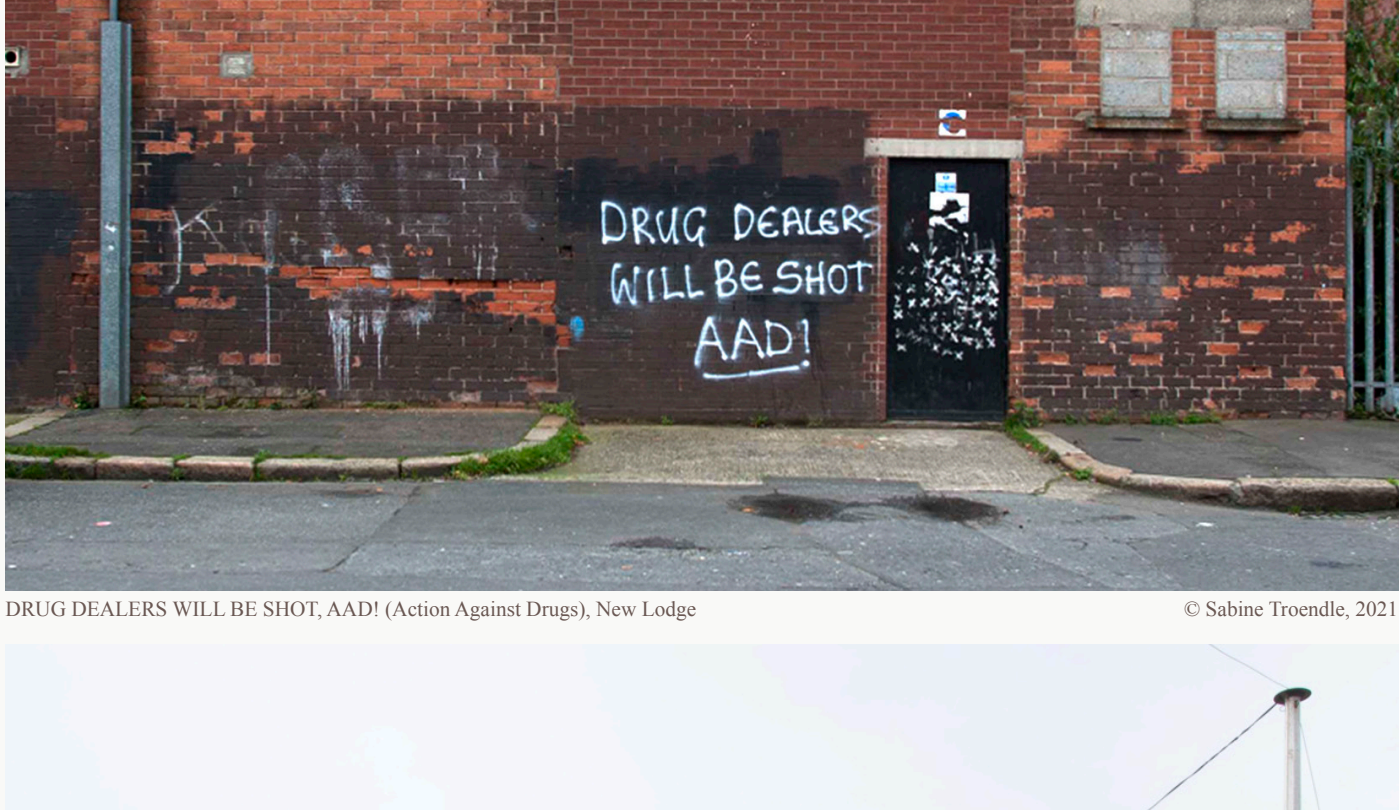
Noah went missing in a staunchly loyalist area where sectarian and racist attacks do occur but where a community centre immediately organised a search operation and locals dropped off provisions for hundreds of people from all over the town searching for the mixed-race Catholic boy – testament to community activism, so typical for Belfast working-class communities. They gathered day after day until the police urged the public to leave the search to professionals.



HUBB Community Resource Centre, east Belfast © Sabine Troendle, 2021



Search party, east Belfast © Sabine Troendle, 2020



Entrance to Noah's school, St Malachy's College, north Belfast © Sabine Troendle, 2020

Noah's mum is still hoping to get to the bottom of her son's death. Whilst the police try to nuke the narrative of misadventure or even suicide, suspicions of a much darker story circulate amongst the people in Belfast – a story so many families have fallen victim to in one or the other way – the story of paramilitary power, information and infiltration. It happened during the Troubles and it's still happening within the republican NEW IRA or the loyalist UVF and UDA. Protection for information. There is no proof of paramilitary involvement in Noah's death. There's only a lot of loose ends, coincidences and a police force that considers to refuse disclosure of certain evidence.

Paramilitary groups represent themselves as the harbingers of justice in communities with a policing vacuum by going after the hoods, the joyriders, the petty thieves, the drug addicts, the dealers and everyone that steps out of line. They impose discipline on the area. They say they've been put under pressure by the community to do something about crime because the police are ineffective. Weekly reports on punishment shootings and beatings are normal. It's swift justice versus state bureaucracy. An acceptable way of punishing criminals.

*"Masked men forced their way into a home and beat and shot a teenager."* Irish News, 15 Feb 2022

*"Two men dressed in black clothes took me out in an alleyway and shot him in the left leg. It was not clear last night if the shooting was by appointment."* Irish News, 27 Oct 2020

*"Deaglan Collins (30) was shot twice in the legs on Springfield Road after being chased from outside a fast-food outlet. He was under threat from an armed group."* Irish News, 20 July 2019

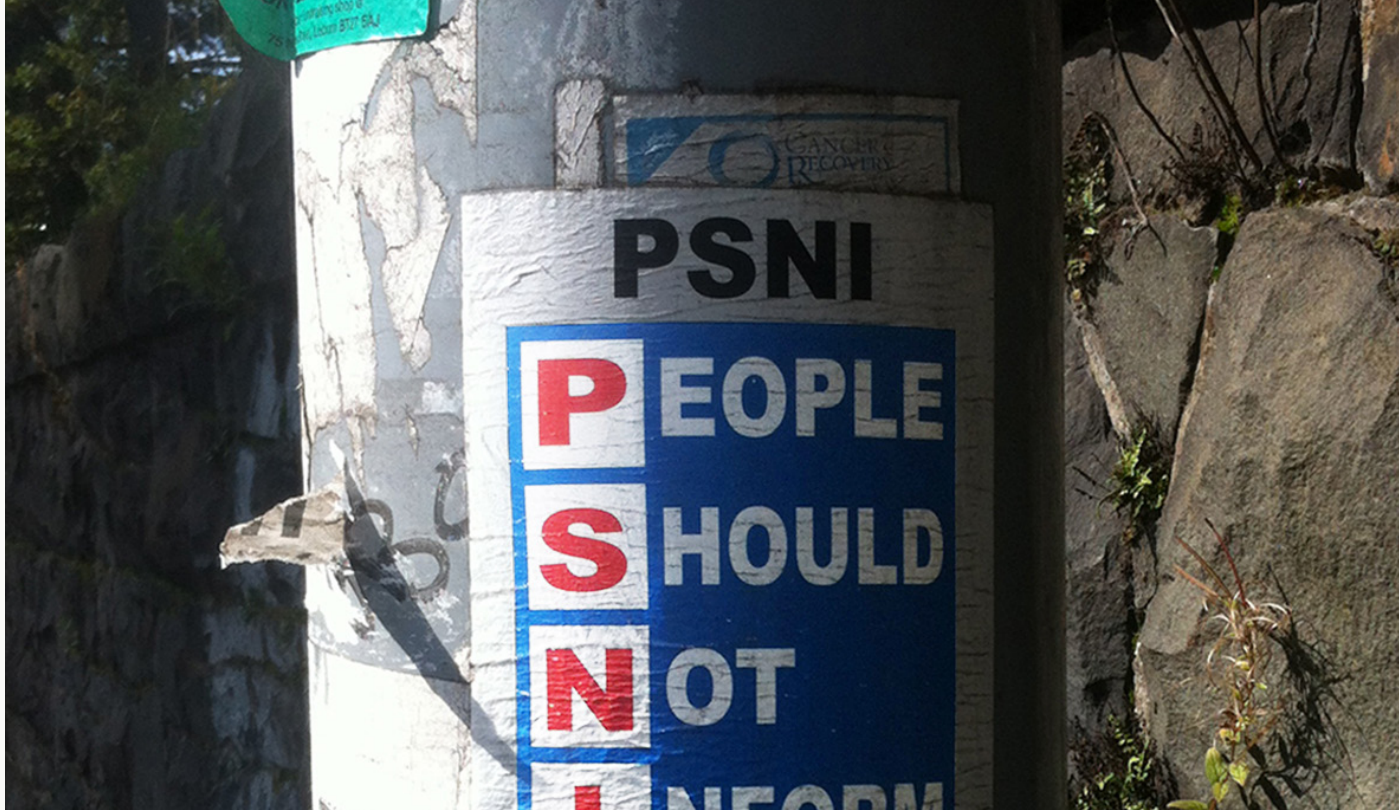
*"The man, who was in his thirties, suffered life-changing injuries when he was shot three times in the legs."* Irish News, 2 Oct 2019

This vigilante justice has brutalised society. It's taken for granted that being shot in the knees and ankles is what happens. And if the paramilitaries command you to a certain place at a certain time, instead of going to the police and ask for protection, you'll take a few painkillers and fresh underwear for the hospital and show up. Wherever by appointment, they call it.

*"My mommy was 'where are you going?' I was like, 'no, I'm just down a bar.' So I went down, had a few wee pints, got a wee text and all, and I walked over at me own. I was like 'mate, I hope you're not trying to pull a dirty one, here, shoot me with a bigger gun and all?' He was like 'I'm not, kid, I'll look after you, I'll look after you.' And he shoved me the gun in his hands, it was a hand-sized gun. He didn't lie to me, like. He didn't. He told me to lie down and bite my arm. I heard the first one and I thought like, wow. He was like, 'did it hit, did it hit?' I said 'of course it did, just do the other one!' I did do bad shit and I accept that. I got shot four times."* Anonymous victim



DRUG DEALERS WILL BE SHOT, AAD! (Action Against Drugs), New Lodge © Sabine Troendle, 2018



HOUSE BREAKERS (will be shot), Lane © Sabine Troendle, 2018



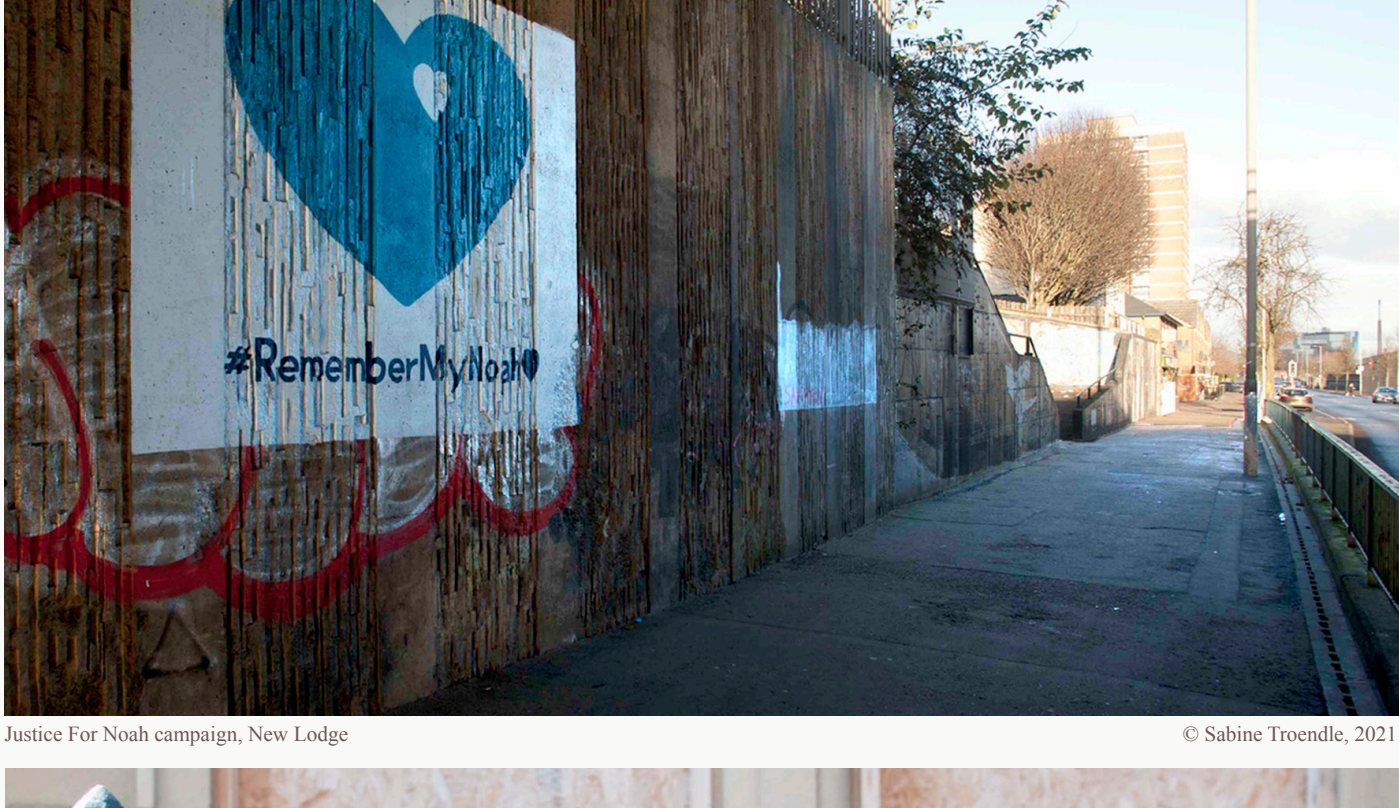
Cisco, Ballymurphy © Sabine Troendle, 2017

The UVF and the UDA recruit young members by selling drugs and let them get into thousands of pounds of debt. Then they can choose between becoming foot soldiers for the organisation's money laundering and extortion business or being beaten up, banished or shot. People say, 'it's not part of my life'. Societal shaming is the reaction. But it's not just about the person who gets hurt and maimed for life. It's about sending out a message to the whole community. It's about saying, 'we run this place, we are in charge'. This way they maintain their coercive control they need to be able to reside and exist in these areas. They are tightening their grip on communities who are in fear to speak out against them.

Andrew Peden lost both his legs in a loyalist paramilitary attack. He knows the perpetrators but will never seek justice. He's afraid for his family. Hugh Brady is a former republican prisoner turned community worker. He would rather be dead than tout on armed republicans. The worst thing an Irish person could be accused of is being an informer. Be it on political grounds – as it is the case in some republican areas where the security forces are the enemy – or pure fear of retaliation, people in working-class communities with paramilitary presence almost never go to the police.



TOUT (Informer), New Lodge © Sabine Troendle, 2017



PEOPLE SHOULD NOT INFORM, Falls Road © Sabine Troendle, 2017



PSNI NOT WELCOME IN ARDOYNE © Sabine Troendle, 2017

Toni Johnston-Ogle made an impressive exception of the rule when she stood up against the UVF, accusing them of months of intimidation culminating in the stabbing of her father Ian Ogle in 2019. She believes that her community in Cluan Place will never forgive them and is hopeful that people will rise up. Close to 2,000 mourners attended the vigil – a strong sign of support for a brave person who is ready to confront the power structures of east Belfast's paramilitaries.

It took the police four days to admit that it was the UVF, who was behind the Ogle-murder when everybody around knew it right away. Why are they so slow in admitting to paramilitary involvement? Who or what are they trying to protect? MI5 infiltration in various groups is not just a memory, the latest exposure of agent Dennis McFadden within the New IRA is an ongoing case. Is it right to gloss over an investigation in order to keep the identity of an informer or agent hidden? Is it more important to keep an operation involving agents or informers going than giving a grieving family justice and closure? How far will they go to protect their sources? As it stands, using the paramilitary power structures constitutes an integral part of politically rubberstamped policing practice creating a murky justice wish-wash. This is not good enough and won't make people feel safe to come forward with information. It's exceptionally hard for Fiona Donohoe to bear the silence surrounding her son's death knowing there's people out there willing to help but too scared to speak out.

*"There's anonymous phone calls with people saying they have information but they have to keep their families safe. They never call back. I just pray that someday somebody will do the right thing and come forward to give information. There's more good people on both sides and it's just a minority that poison a community."* Fiona Donohoe

More than 280,000 people have signed a petition for the police to release the files on Noah Donohoe uncensored. NOAH'S ARMY, a formation of friends, sympathisers and human rights campaigners, is supporting Fiona in her battle to get justice for her son. Not allowing to be silenced, Toni and Fiona show courage and determination on their journey against societal apathy and political status quo.



NOAH's story: campaigning for justice, Belfast © Sabine Troendle, 2021



Justice For Noah campaign, New Lodge © Sabine Troendle, 2021



Ian Ogle remembered one year on, east Belfast © Sabine Troendle, 2020

Since the signing of the GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT, a lot of money has gone into helping paramilitary organisations transition to peace. Those groups who moved on, and there's a lot of people who've played a positive role and done a lot for the peace process, they moved on a long time ago. What is left is criminals.

*"We need to move away from the language of paramilitary and Troubles romanticism. What we're talking about is gangsterism, criminals terrorising and controlling their communities. For children and young people to escape from power and from that control, there's an awful lot to be done. And also in order for these communities to feel strong and safe enough to come forward and to say, you have no place here. But that can only happen when there's confidence particularly in the police and social services that they will actually keep them safe."* Koula Ysaouma, Children's Commissioner

Transition cannot continue indefinitely, but 24 years on, money from Westminster still runs into the hands of the groups. It seems that violence pays.

Trevor Birney, Above the Law, Documentary, RTE, 2015

William Crawley, Is educating paramilitarism how we build a shared society? Talkback, BBC Radio Ulster, 29 Sep 2017

Fiona Donohoe, interview with James English, YouTube, 30 Jan 2022

Stacey Dooley Investigates, Show by my neighbour, BBC, 2018

Stephen Nolan, Paramilitary Punishment, The Nolan Show, BBC Radio Ulster, 15 Oct 2021

Sinead O'Shea, A mother brings her son to be shot, Documentary, 2019

BBC News, Belfast Telegraph, The Guardian, Irish News, Sunday Life