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Belfast Interface Project
Annual Report
December 2008 – March 2010

Overview

Here's a brief summary of some of our main achievements over the past fifteen months.

Publications have included 'Local Accommodation: Effective Practice in responding to disputes over parades', a research document highlighting some key features of the wealth of effective practice in addressing parades-related protests and disputes outside Belfast.

Development work has included supporting the provision of cross-border residentials with a number of groups from Clonard, Highfield, Lower Shankill and Drogheda as well as the provision of opportunities, on a cross-community basis, for employment-related and inter-cultural training, education and strategic planning for adults and young people in 3 different interface settings within the city. We have also promoted in a number of interface settings the positive value of the approach taken in the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project, as a model worthy of consideration in engaging with disaffected youths in an interface context.

We have worked with local groups and agencies to support the design and delivery of a community relations consultation strategy in the Tigers Bay area of North Belfast and we have continued to support the development of the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG) and Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project (SRRP).

We have assisted in managing valuable training projects led by Mediation Northern Ireland and the Workers' Educational Association and we have continued our membership of the Interface Working Group and Community Partners Group in seeking to find a long-term 'roadmap' towards a future where the necessity for interface barriers is reduced over time.

Board members have also held a number of positive meetings with the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC) to exchange perspectives and explore potential for co-operation, and management staff from both organisations have begun to meet regularly.

Against this very positive backdrop in terms of work progressed, we have been sorry to lose two valuable members of staff due to the end of funding contracts: our Support Worker Sam Askin and Conflict Transformation Support Project Development Worker Erik Cownie. We wish them well and record our thanks to them for their contribution.

Our board of directors have continued their strategic and operational planning processes, informed by our recent survey of membership needs, and have restructured BIP as part of this work. BIP has emerged with a range of new and positive areas of work through which we aim to build upon recent change and the work already existing 'on the ground'. I would like to extend my appreciation to all concerned.

Chris O'Halloran, Director
March 2010

Aim 1: To be proactive in linking and involving local communities in changing policy and in advocating for change that is of practical benefit to interface communities.

Objectives:

1.1. BIP will work in partnership to influence policy

Actions:

1.1.1 Develop a policy network from BIP membership and the interface community sector.

We were informed in December 2009 that our small grant application to Belfast City Council for Peace 3 funding had been successful. Through the funding we commissioned a piece of external consultancy work from Roz Goldie Partnership which will by December 31st 2010:

- Document effective practice in the development of issue based policy networks and platforms.
- Gauge support for the development of a practitioners' forum offering a) peer-support and networking opportunities for community activists, groups and other stakeholders in the development of shared space, and b) a policy network through which to more effectively influence interface neighbourhood regeneration policy.

1.2. Promote over a three to five year period the importance of an integrated strategy to transform interface communities into cohesive communities

Actions:

1.2.1 Annual review of opportunities to influence policy areas by working in partnership with agencies and departments over a 3-5 year period

- a) Continued membership of the Interface Working Group (IWG), Interface Community Partners Group and Hazelwood Community Partnership
- b) BIP Board meeting held with Deloitte to discuss Deloitte findings and proposals to Belfast City Council re regeneration of interface areas and possible indicators of success.
- c) Over the period, BIP was represented on the following: CFNI Communities in Transition advisory group; Community Dialogue Executive; board of Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project; board of Institute for Conflict Research.
- d) BIP liaised with organisers of the Manchester Architecture Research Centre (MARC) research project exhibition which was opened in November 2009 at the Place Centre, Belfast and will later tour in Beirut, Berlin, Amsterdam and Manchester.
- e) A BIP/Community Dialogue joint application to NI Tourist Board re 'peacebuilding project tours' concept was unsuccessful.
- f) A BIP Peace 3 tender application to Belfast City Council Good Relations Unit in line with Action 2.3 – 'Inter-community forum including dialogue on the removal of interfaces' was unsuccessful.

1.3. Develop capacity to influence and reflect within the Interface Policy Network

Actions:

1.3.1 Design and implement a programme with the policy network of facilitated sessions sharing experience, briefings to develop capacity for reflection and influence

This action will follow the completion of 1.1.1a) above, if the consultancy report shows evidence of support for the formation of the policy network.

1.4. Develop knowledge base, aid reflection and influence action

Actions:

1.4.1 Commission and disseminate research or surveys as agreed.

'Local Accommodation: Effective Practice in responding to disputes over parades': this research project was fundraised for and commissioned in July 2008. The final research publication, highlighting some of the key features of the wealth of effective practice that exists in addressing parades-related protests and disputes outside Belfast, was emailed and posted in hard copy to members and key stakeholders in July 2009.

1.5 Build on linkages with interface networks

Actions:

1.5.1 Develop relationships with non-member interface networks: meet Management Committees of BCRC, NBIN, LINC etc. in 2009 and thereafter formally twice per year.

BIP board members made contact with the Steering Group of BCRC during 2009 and held two positive joint meetings were useful in exchanging perspectives and in identifying areas of potential collaborative work.

Regular meetings between BCRC Project Manager and BIP Director have also been initiated. Meetings with other networks to be arranged.

1.6. Development of BIP and relevance of learning beyond Belfast

Actions:

1.6.1 Formally explore the interface-related issues and needs being identified at specific locations outside of Belfast; enter into exploratory discussions about the relevance of expertise and information which could be shared.

Initial and tentative contacts have been made in a number of areas outside Belfast with a view to exploring this area of work further during 2010.

Aim 2: To support interface communities and to advocate with agencies and others in order to address issues of safety in interface communities and safe access to work and services, through improved relationships between communities, increased labour mobility and the development of shared services.

Objectives:

2.1. Advocate the advantages of sharing taking into account the realities and difficulties which may apply

Actions:

2.1.1 Promote sharing through large and small group discussions and the dissemination of successful models of practice in the creation of shared space, including Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG).

The piece of external consultancy work which we have commissioned from Roz Goldie Partnership, mentioned at 1.1.1 above, includes 2 further aims:

- To carry out and record at least 12 interviews with practitioners experienced in the creation of shared space in neighbourhoods close to an interface;
- Based on the interviews, to write a new publication outlining key features of effective practice in the development of shared space in areas close to an interface, by June 30th 2010, and co-ordinate printing of 500 copies.

This work is underway.

2.2. Promote accessibility of local services and facilities

Actions:

2.2.1 On a pilot basis, proactively identify a number of clearly defined statutory services or facilities which are associated with access difficulties and work inclusively with the relevant agencies, community and youth groups and residents to promote greater access to these.

2.3. Support member groups with practical support and involve in each others learning

Actions:

2.3.1 Provide information and assistance on obtaining youth resources and crisis intervention.

- a) BIP gave a presentation on the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project at the 'Restoring Respect' conference organised by the Youth Justice Agency on Nov 11th & 12th in the Europa Hotel.
- b) BIP continued to support the development of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project over this period, and to promote this model of work through a Belfast City Council Peace 3 small grant project which included delivery of three BIP presentations, alongside key partners, of the value of this approach at different interface-related venues across the city.

2.3.2 Build on labour mobility training project education.

We have continued to work with community groups and agencies in a range of interface areas across the city to build upon our successful IFI-funded Labour Mobility training project through which we offered anti-racism and anti-sectarianism training together with construction skills register (CSR) training and some forklift and pallet truck training to people aged 16-40, with the majority of trainees in the 16-25 age range. Through our Belfast City Council Peace 3 small grant-funded Interface Mobility project, BIP provided opportunities, this time on a cross-community basis, for employment-related and inter-cultural training, education and strategic planning for adults and young people in 3 different interface settings within the North, South and East of the city.

2.3.3 Roll out youth mediation project - strategic planning for adults and young people in interface areas.

Through Belfast City Council Peace 3 small grant funding, BIP delivered two cross-border residentials involving community groups from within the Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist communities of West Belfast and groups/cultural bodies/agencies from the Republic of Ireland.

Residential 1 (April 2009): Clonard and Highfield Women's groups completed an engagement process with Drogheda Women's group. This residential was facilitated by Trademark Training

Residential 2 (May 2009): Lower Shankill Community Association and Prisoners in Partnership (Highfield) completed a shared history project encompassing a field visit to Dublin and engagement process with the Irish Memorial Society.

Aim 3: To support interface communities to develop positive relationships by encouraging and enabling co-operation, promoting articulation and understanding of key issues involved in sharing and division, and providing support through change.

Objectives:

3.1. Support conflict transformation, reconciliation and conflict management in communities

Actions:

3.1.1 Advocate the development of a city-wide dialogue initiative complementary to the Interface Working Group/Community Partners group.

3.1.2 Respond to requests and provide independent facilitation, mediation and mentoring support at local interfaces and develop a mentoring programme

- a) BIP provided a mentoring service to SLIG over this period.
- b) Provided facilitation support for a SLIG/Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project (SRRP) joint planning day on October 5th.
- c) BIP facilitated and co-ordinated the design and delivery of a Tigers Bay Community Relations Consultation Strategy, working with the Tigers Bay Community Relations Working Group. The strategy included generation of local news-sheets and posters, hosting of local workshops in various venues, delivery of a door-to-door survey, plus news-sheets and public meeting to announce findings, and formation of a new group incorporating Tigers Bay representation through which to address local community relations issues.

3.2.3 Actively develop strategic partnerships with facilitation / mediation / dialogue and training organisations to support activist and residents to encourage dialogue and grow facilitation skills.

- a) BIP has been represented on the management group of a Mediation Northern Ireland-led training partnership - the Belfast Mediation Capacity Building Project – alongside Belfast Reconciliation Network, the North and West Belfast Parades and Cultural Forum, and Tides Training Consultancy.

The project offers basic and advanced training in mediation skills to activists in interface areas.

b) BIP has also been represented on the management group of a Workers' Educational Association-led training partnership - the Belfast Divercity Project – alongside Mediation Northern Ireland (MNI) and the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC). The project offers a programme of training and support for organisations who wish to explore the development of collaborative working relationships across organisational boundaries and cultural differences.

c) BIP signposted groups to training providers, funders and other conflict transformation resources such as Intercomm, North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum, LINC, Ulster People's College and others.

Aim 4: To ensure that membership remains reflective of interface communities as changes occur and that the organisation is managed efficiently and effectively.

Objectives

4.1. Ensure that membership remains reflective of interface communities

Actions:

4.1.1 Consult, support and continually develop BIP membership to reflect the changing interface communities

Our BIP membership survey was part-funded by CRC and Belfast City Council and carried out by an external agency - Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) - as our membership is considerably larger now than when the last membership survey was carried out, in 2004. The survey report was forwarded to members and key stakeholders and, at Belfast City Council request, to members of the Interface Working Group in June 2009.

4.2. Increase the visibility of interface communities in promoting positive change and cohesion; increase visibility of BIP

Actions:

4.2.1 Produce and distribute the Interface news-sheet.

4.2.2 Develop the website as an interactive tool.

4.3. Organisational effectiveness: Accountability and Strategy

Actions:

4.3.1 Independent monitoring and evaluation

4.3.2 Commission an annual audit

2008-09 audit finalised.

Audit tenders invited.

4.3.3 Hold an annual AGM

BIP's last (8th) AGM was held on 26th November, 2008.

4.3.4 Hold an annual team building and forward planning residential.

4.4. Organisational effectiveness: Human Resources and Finance

Actions:

4.4.1 Update policies and procedures as required.

4.4.2 Maintain an effective staff team

- a) Following collapse of NICPS pension scheme, transferred staff to a personal pension plan.
- b) Our Support Worker Sam Askin's funding contract ended on June 15th 2009; our Conflict Transformation Support Project Development Worker Erik Cownie's funding contract ended on August 31st 2009; our Senior Support Worker Marnie Kennedy returned from maternity leave on June 8th 2009.
- c) New staffing structure drawn up following strategic planning process.
- d) Esmee funding and CRC funding applications were successful.

4.4.3 Produce and review 5 year rolling budget annual budget and projected cash flows

- a) Budget to March 31, 2014 drafted to accompany new Strategic Plan. Reviewed by board of directors and finalised in February 2010.
- b) Cash flow reports reviewed monthly by board.

4.5. Organisational effectiveness: Board development

Actions:

4.5.1 Develop an annual board development programme