Belfast Interface Project

Annual Report

October 2007 – November 2008

Overview:

New publications have included 'The Whitewell Youth Mediation Project: A Case Study', which we feel documents an important contribution towards effective practice in reducing youth-led interface violence. We are also very grateful to Northern Visions TV for devoting significant resources towards the production of 'Interface', a series of programmes on 2 DVDs, which they also kindly made available for us to copy to members and key stakeholders. Our longstanding collaborative partnership with the Institute for Conflict Research has continued through the year as we have commissioned ICR to gather an up-to-date picture of the nature of Belfast's interface architecture.

We have continued, resources permitting, to produce our *Interface* news-sheet and have been gratified that the findings of our survey of news-sheet feedback were extremely positive. We have inputted into the important work of the inter-agency Interface Working Group in drafting a 'roadmap' which will address the future for interfaces in the city, and we have surveyed the views of our membership which will be invaluable in informing the work of BIP in the future.

The past year has been a difficult one in terms of changes in the staff team and the coming to an end of tranches of funding, together with uncertainties about future sustainability which we know are shared across the sector. Against that backdrop, though, we have supported an effective North Belfast mobile phone network, the delivery of very successful Labour Mobility Project training in a number of parts of the city, and a range of community-based initiatives including provision of strategic planning support to a number of groupings within the city.

Our new board of directors (we became a company limited by guarantee during the year) have devoted much time and thought during the year in redrafting a new strategic plan for the organisation. Board members support the work of BIP in a purely voluntary capacity, and we are grateful to them for this. Similarly, thanks are due to volunteers Grace Bates and Laoise Neylon and to placement student Harry Maher for their help and support during the year. The work contained in this report is the result of the effort of many – staff members old and new, board members, volunteers, funders and others – I would like to extend my appreciation to all concerned.

Chris O'Halloran, Director,
November 2008

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Aim 1: To enhance and develop the knowledge base regarding Belfast's interface areas

Objectives:

a) Prepare a bibliography of abstracts of interface-related material:
We received 400 copies of our 'Parades & Protests' collection of abstracts of existing literature regarding parades and parades-related protest, and sent a copy to every member and a wider mailing list of key stakeholders.

b) Identify & document areas of effective practice:
We have fundraised for and commissioned a piece of research which will aim to document effective practice in addressing parades-related disputes; this will be published in early 2009.

c) Produce a website of information, resources and links:
We have made a range of information available for download from our website at www.belfastinterfaceproject.org This has included pdf files of: the 'Parades & Protests' collection of abstracts of existing literature regarding parades and parades-related protest; the Interface and Security Barrier Mapping Project documenting listing NIO and non NIO-built interface architecture in Belfast; recent *Interface* news-sheets, and 'The Whitewell Youth Mediation Project: a case study'.

d) Map NIO & residential interfaces:
We fundraised for and commissioned ICR to carry out a piece of research documenting Belfast's non NIO-built interface defensive architecture, to supplement our existing information on the NIO-built interface structures in the city. We have forwarded this information to members and key stakeholders including members of the Interface Working Group (see Aim 2. c) ii), below), and we have made this document available for download from our website.

Other:
e) NVTV 'Interface' series:
Following BIP representation to them, Northern Visions (NVTV) have made a series of tv programmes charting the history of and key issues for Belfast's interface communities. The series of 4 40-minute programmes on 2 DVDs is made up of interviews with representatives of a range of key constituencies each with a particular role/perspective on issues for interface communities, including community activists and academics, ex-combatants, politicians, and voluntary and statutory sector personnel. We have forwarded the DVDs to members and key stakeholders and we are very grateful to Northern Visions for their valuable work in this area.

Aim 2. To lobby for change that is of practical benefit to interface communities.

Objectives:

a) Prepare a lobbying plan:
The board and staff have spent much time preparing a new strategic plan covering the period 2008 – 2013 and, within the plan, clarifying the areas in which BIP will aim to influence policy more effectively in the future.

b) Membership of Community Relations Council and other influential bodies:
Over the past year, BIP has been represented on the following: CFNI Communities in Transition advisory group; Community Dialogue Executive; Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project; Institute for Conflict Research; Community Relations Council (finished April '08); CRC Funding Committee (Victims & Survivors Groups) (finished April '08); Parenting in a Divided Society advisory group (finished Feb '08).

c) Manage process of change with influential bodies:
  i) We drew up and sent in a BIP response to the Programme for Government in December '07.
  ii) We have been active members of the inter-agency Interface Working Group, formed to draw up a 'security without walls' good relations strategy through which to address the long-term future of interfaces with community support.
  iii) We took part in an inter-agency study visit to Leicester in Feb '08 as part of the work of Belfast City Council's Conflict Transformation Project. The study aimed to identify learnings from Leicester (the most ethnically diverse city in Britain, which might be applied to our context here, and was very informative.
  iv) We also took part in a brief visit to Manchester in Feb '08 to help inform a multi-national research project addressing conflict and the built environment in a number of cities.
  v) We have been represented within the Hazelwood group, a recently-formed inter-community forum covering the greater Whitewell/Greencastle area of North Belfast, and chaired by CRC and the North Belfast Community Action Unit, formed to help promote good relations in the area.

Aim 3. To consult, develop and support the membership of Belfast Interface Project.

Objectives:

a) Develop opportunities for peer-support:
We took the last-minute decision, with regret, to cancel the Mobile Phone Network seminar which we had planned to hold in autumn 2007 in Farset International. This decision was taken because it became clear to us in the late stages of project planning that there was a need to re-engage with a number of key stakeholders. A further thematic discussion on the subject of the experiences of ethnic minority groups/individuals living in interface areas of Belfast, planned for April '08, was later cancelled also due to lack of resources as our Peace 2.5-funded key worker in the project – Gary McClean - left BIP in April '08 to take up employment elsewhere.

b) Continue to produce 'Interface' news-sheet.
Issue 9 was produced and disseminated in March 2008. Issue 10 was to be produced in June 2008 but was cancelled due to lack of staff. We also carried out a survey of news-sheet feedback during the year, which was extremely positive.

c) Update members' information pack:
Ongoing.

d) Develop individual, group & associate membership:

The following have joined as members over the past year:

Community Group members:
Benmore Community Development Association
North Belfast Women's Initiative & Support Project
Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne
Mid-Skegoneill Community Group

Associate members:
Belfast Activity Centre
Community Arts Forum
BELB Youth Service

Individual members:
None.

e) Hold conferences addressing critical issues:
Nothing further to report.

f) Evaluate and adapt BIP/CD joint project:
We worked with Community Dialogue (CD) to re-shape this project during the year so that BIP would pay costs (from Peace 2.5 funding) of BIP members to take up training (accredited and unaccredited) offered by CD. Unfortunately, internal staffing changes within CD prevented them from offering the revised project to our members.

g) Identify further membership support needs:
The 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 also covered a number of non-member key stakeholders. The finalised survey report is currently being prepared.

Other:
h) 'Human Rights & Conflict Intervention' training course:
The Institute for Conflict Research (ICR), in conjunction with the Human Rights Commission, offered a successful 1-day training course in 'Human Rights & Conflict Intervention' to BIP members in Dec '07.

Aim 4. To assist interface communities in addressing conflict.

Objectives:

a) Support interface communities in developing and gaining access to crisis-response mechanisms:
Nothing further to report.

b) Support and assist in the development of mobile phone networks, within BIP resources:
    i) Greater Suffolk/Poleglass MPN:

BIP's role in supporting this large 24-phone MPN, which we fundraised for, ended in April 2008.

ii) White City Whitewell MPN:
We have continued to support this MPN for a second year, to end of April '09, and aim that the MPN will become self-managing over this period.

c) Provide signposting services:
BIP has continued to signpost member groups and other community groups to sources of training and conflict transformation resources.

d) Provide a forum for informed debate on models of conflict transformation:
We have recently produced a short publication written by Erik Cownie: 'The Whitewell Youth Mediation Project: a case study' which documents the work to date of the Whitewell Youth Mediation project in impacting on youth-led interface violence in this part of North Belfast and outlines a number of other key issues stemming from work in this area. We aim, alongside community partners, to promote this model of youth work as an approach which may be worthy of consideration in other interface areas.

e) Continue to practise conflict management, reconciliation and transformation in communities:
Work supporting strategic planning has continued in Clonard, Suffolk and Lower Shankill. BIP has also promoted cross-border development work with PUL community activists in West Belfast and New Border Generation, and has worked with Seaview Presbyterian Church's in supporting the development of a reconciliation project.

f) Maximise levels of uptake of training and support in the areas of 'addressing the legacies of the past' and 'developing conflict transformation skills':
We have continued to work with community groups and agencies in a range of interface areas across the city to deliver training associated with our Labour Mobility Project. This training has been taken up by approx 160 people aged 16-40, with the majority of trainees in the 16-25 age range. All trainees have taken up anti-racism and anti-sectarianism training together with construction skills register (CSR) training and some forklift and pallet truck training. Targeted areas have included the Markets, the Shankill, greater Whitewell, Ballysillan and the Crumlin Road areas.

Aim 5. To manage Belfast Interface Project effectively and efficiently.

Objectives:

a) Update policies and procedures:
All BIP policies and procedures have been reviewed and updated by an external consultancy (4 Sight Solutions).

b) Agree & implement new terms & conditions & pension arrangements:
Nothing further to report.

c) Ensure that management of finances is accountable and transparent:

We were successful in our CRC core-funding application of October 2007, so that CRC is continuing to part-fund 3 BIP posts with some running costs until March 2010. Our funding application to IFI Community Bridges was unsuccessful, however, and our Peace 2.5 funding ended in Sep '08, so that we are currently seeking alternative funding from a range of sources in order to implement our new strategic plan. Sam Askin, our previously Peace 2.5 –funded Support Worker, has moved into the vacancy created by the uptake of maternity leave by our Senior Support Worker Marnie Kennedy (congratulations to Marnie on the birth of her little girl Nessa).

d) Identify and secure premises that meet the needs of membership and staff:
Nothing further to report.

e) Maintain regular monitoring and evaluation practices:
We have secured the services of CENI in evaluating the work of the project and advising where necessary on appropriate monitoring practices.

f) Identify and avail of appropriate training opportunities:
All of our staff have been supported to access appropriate training opportunities. These have included the degree course in Community Development at UUJ, the Cert HE course in Community Development and Education offered by BIFHE at the Springvale campus, a personal development training course, training in proofreading provided by the Publishing Training Centre, the foundation degree course in Managing Voluntary and Community Organisations, offered by Leicester University (distance learning), plus training in governance offered by NICVA and also CRC training in Peace II closure.

g) Deliver training to management committee and staff in: team-building, interface issues, lobbying skills:
Nothing further to report.

h) Hold a regular Annual General Meeting:
Nothing further to report.

i) Maintain an effective staff team:
We have secured the services of CareCall, which offers a confidential Employment Assistance Programme to all members of staff. All staff attended individual CareCall 'Dignity at work' sessions during November '07.
The staffing sub-committee has met regularly; appraisal meetings have been held with all staff.
Laoise Neylon worked with us as a volunteer for some months during late 2007 / early 2008. She helped to design and carry out the news-sheet survey as well as with general admin. Grace Bates also continued to volunteer with us over much of 2008. Harry Maher, a fellow degree student with Erik at UUJ, also came to BIP on a student placement in January '08 with a remit to help identify alternative funding streams for BIP. We are very grateful for the assistance given by Laoise, Harry and especially Grace over the year.

j) Maintain and develop organisational planning process:
Staff and board members attended a strategic planning residential in the Burrendale Hotel, Newcastle, in January '08. The board spent much of their meeting time during

the year reviewing our old strategic plan and drawing up a new plan for the period
2008 – 2013.

Other:
k) Board membership:
Frank Higgins (Transition Training), Margaret Valente (Star Neighbourhood Centre),
Paul Collins (Corner House) and Frank Brennan (Short Strand Community Forum)
were co-opted onto the board of directors during the course of the year.

l) Change of BIP Legal Status:
BIP is now formally a company limited by guarantee with company number
NI067459 and our previous charitable status has been extended to the new company.

m) SLIG mentoring consultancy work:
We have taken up this role and this generates some income to BIP.